

Night Changes

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Hermione, in an effort to improve the Wolfsbane potion, becomes trapped in the world of Attack on Titan - Armin x Hermione

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Night Changes

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Author's Update](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[9-11\(okay i know this title looks weird\)](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

The fact that spending her nights in the Forbidden Forest was preferable to her day job was a testament to just how *terrible* her day job was.

Working in the Department of Magical Creatures was just as tedious as expected, but much less rewarding. Rarely were her ideas considered, hell, it was a miracle if they were even *passed*.

Yet she kept pushing along. At first, she chalked it up to lack of seniority, but as she climbed the ranks of the department, she realized that wasn't true at all. The system in itself was corrupt. It allowed for stagnancy and lack of change.

Frustrations piling up, she decided to take matters into her own hands.

In tribute to Remus Lupin, she decided to work on improving the Wolfsbane potion. As one of the last times they talked, they discussed its efficacy. As he stressed to reiterate his gratitude for the current product, he did manage to express certain faults with potion: occasional loss of self, wolfish influence on said self, etc.

Being more than proficient in potions but exceptional at Arithmancy, she first used calculations to aid in her potions making. After weeks of careful deducting, she came to the possible conclusion that a lengthier, yet more potent version of the potion required the gathering, preparing, and brewing of the potion to all be done on full moons.

She set to work right away, taking a month and half of unused vacation time and sick leave to focus solely on the potion. She was currently on day number three of that time- which happened to be a

full moon. As she had been planning for a while, she already knew where to go and how to collect them.

Luckily some ingredients just sat at the edge of the forest, easy to spot and collect. Others were more elusive and required a deeper trek and more tedious collecting ritual. *No wonder this potion was so expensive.*

The journey was so bad. She hadn't brought much- well, she hadn't carried much- she brought her beaded bag which carried her food, shelter, tools, and other miscellaneous items (some as old as when she had first used the bag during the war). So there was no real physical stress, she also enjoyed the view. Some would say it looked ominous, Hermione would say it looked hauntingly beautiful.

At the moment, she had her beaded bag hanging from wrist and her wand which was still casting a light Lumos between her teeth as she measured the amount of Aconite she could put in a jar. Satisfied with the amount, she put the full jar back in her beaded bag, held her wand and went on searching for the next ingredient.

She blew a stray curl from her face, *this bun will just not hold.*

She should've taken up Angelina's offer of giving her a protective style, but frankly, Hermione did not have 6 hours to waste *not working*. Though, in retrospect, she did kind of need it. She was working herself to the bone...

Even now on her vacation time, she was working. She sighed. *Potion first, work on your obsessive habits later.*

As she walked, she made a mental map of where she needed to stop and turn to go back, but as she kept walking, the Forbidden Forest lost its usual vegetation and almost started looking like... a different forest?

When she noticed the moon had suddenly vanished from its previous spot, she made the decision to turn around and head back.

Though, the more she walked, the less she recognized. *For once-just once, can something go as planned?*

At last, she spotted something different, blue toned lights coming from the distance. *Hagrid perhaps, come to help me?*

The thought only reassured her safety so she confidently strode out, Lumos in full blaze, when she realized- *these people were not Hagrid.*

They quickly surrounded her. But she too was quick and she extinguished Lumos and pointed her wand at them in self-defense. That seemed to confuse some and humor others.

Damn, they're muggles.

She wanted to obey the Statue of Secrecy, to put her wand down and even try to barter and deescalate the situation, but she understood- by the look in their eyes- this was life or death right now. She had no time for frivolous Statues, so she held her wand at them with an even tighter grip.

With Lumos gone she was heavily shrouded by the shadows, the soldiers were far enough that their lanterns would not expose her too much. So she used that to her advantage, stepping deeper into the shadows.

They spoke to her in a foreign language that sounded Germanic but not quite. *There goes my chance of negotiation...* Unless she used a translation charm, though, due to the predicted length of use, her magical energy would drain and she wouldn't have enough strength left for a battle.

How did German muggles get to Wizarding Scotland? Or how could she even end up in a Germanic speaking area? Had she stepped into magical clearing that could instantly transport her to another country? If so, how? Was she inside a different pocket of time? Again, if so, how?

She stilled her body, eyes darting to keep an eye on all possible exits and opponents. The thought of apparating returned to her but she quickly noticed more people in the trees. And if they were in the *goddamn* trees, there could be more wherever she did manage to apparate.

She studied her opponent as the lack of auditory information made the visual her focus. They looked... *kind of* like soldiers, they definitely acted like them. *There must be a war going on; that's why they're so hostile.* She cursed herself for not being more up to date with muggle affairs. Ever since the war, the Wizarding World had practically consumed her... *ever since I'd lost my parents more likely.*

She mentally shook herself to focus and noticed most held swords, which was favorable due to her upper hand in far distance conflicts. However, some had shotguns at the ready as well.

Fuck .

The longer she stayed silent, the more aggressive they became; seemingly demanding her identity and reason for being there. Hermione deemed it an understandable response. They had not shot her down already, which meant they weren't out for blood, but out to protect themselves.

Knowing this, she decided to take a chance.

She whispered the translation spell for German as it was the closest from what she's heard.

She brought her wand down to her side, but was no less tense, "My name is Hermione Granger, I've gotten lost and this has all just been a big misunderstanding."

She waited a moment for a response before continuing, "Did you understand me?"

A hooded man stepped out of the shadows and more into the lantern-illuminated light. He was short, for a man of his age, and yet, he still managed to be taller than her.

Maybe my height could make me seem less of a threat to them?

But with the way the sea of people parted for him in respect and the wariness they had in response to her. She thought it was unlikely.

Now was not the time to respect their lack of height biases, Hermione.

"Aye, we understand you well enough," his eyes narrowed dangerously. Another hooded person popped out from behind with much less animosity and much more curiosity. From appearance alone, their gender wasn't apparent; they presented much more androgynous than any of the other soldiers she'd seen.

They had a crazed grin, but the glint in their goggle-covered eyes was no less dangerous than the man before them, "Let's say you were telling the truth, and you were lost; where are you from? Did you come from outside the walls? Have you been here the whole time? Is that why you speak so oddly? If so, how have you survived the Titans duri-

"-Oi," he interrupted, "we don't have time for this." With his eyes still on her, he glared, "If you really are lost, you wouldn't mind a nice, restrained walk in our custody- would you?"

Hermione waited a beat before nodding, "I'll be your prisoner," she said, cutting to the chase, "under one condition." She waited a breath for an objection, but with none she continued, "You'll have to confiscate my possessions- I understand that, but please don't play with or abuse them."

It was risky- announcing their importance with such urgency- but with their reactions so far, she chanced that they would at least be honorable enough to honor that.

The man looked to a taller blonde who seemed to be considering the option. He nodded once and the hooded man walked over to restrain her.

She stopped them before he could fully make his way over, "After you take this," she motioned to her wand, "We won't be able to understand each other anymore." She made sure the look on her face made clear that she was telling the truth.

He narrowed his eyes at her but nodded in understanding.

She gave them everything she had but they still searched her afterwards. They tied her wrists together- a bit too tight for her liking, but she could manage. She was then walked over to a train of horses where she was pushed to walk next to a horse towards the front.

She walked in silence, warily watching the soldier that was not-so-subtly watching her. They were studying Hermione as if she was a specimen under a microscope. It gave her the creeps. What was so *fascinating* about her? She understood that her actions *would* be very odd to a muggle, but was it enough to elicit this much visual attention?

The soldier then started asking her question sounding sentences, which was of no use since Hermione couldn't understand a damn thing.

It got to a point where she decided to use the little German she did know.

"W-was?" She said, putting some hesitancy into her pronunciation to really "*demonstrate*" her ignorance.

The soldier asked another question to which Hermione shrugged in response. She began speaking in her native language to really drive the point home, "I really don't understand anything you're saying to me."

The goggled soldier gasped in surprise. *Had they never heard someone speak English before?*

The short, hooded man from before spoke to the goggled soldier resulting in an "ahhh" of understanding. The soldier fished around in a bag on her side where they pulled out Hermione's wand.

Even though she knew exactly where it was, her heart still ached from the separation.

The soldier then carefully placed her wand in Hermione's wrist restrained hands. Hermione eyed the hooded man from before and could see him gripping the handles of his swords. They were still at the ready if she decided to pull something. Which she wouldn't... *not now at least.*

She nodded to them in thanks, then spoke the translation spell.

"Can you understand me better now?"

They nodded, "Why do you need a stick to speak with us?" They had cocked their head to the side in confusion. It would've been a very endearing gesture had she not been their prisoner.

She debated on what to say. Should she lie to avoid shit with the Ministry or should she tell the truth to avoid shit with them: these soldiers ready maim- or kill if need be. There was no telling on how long she'd be staying there and she needed allies right now, not enemies. And lying was *not* going to gain her any allies.

So she made her decision, "It's called a wand and I use it for more than just translating." It wasn't just the goggled soldier that looked at her curiously- now, it was the whole lot of them.

"I'm a..." she thought about whether using the word "witch" would instantly bring about a negative response, but it was too late now. *Apparating was always an option, especially since she already had her wand.*

"I'm a witch. I use this wand as a sort of vessel for channeling my innate magical power."

She heard a few puffs of air preceding a gaggle of laughter from behind. She smiled to herself, better they laugh at me than shoot me on sight for heresy.

" *Oh. My. Gods. Pleeeease tell me you're telling the truth. How did you get them, were you born with magic or trained to get it? Did it hurt... like really bad-*" Hermione thought of her scars and the hardships she had to face just to be able to prove she was worthy of magic- *yeah, you know what, it did hurt.*

As the soldier began to shake her by the shoulders, rapidly asking more questions, she cut them off with a quick flick of her wand. *Colovaria*, she thought.

It was a harmless spell and would be very effective in proving her truth.

Suddenly, the soldier's Forest Green cloak turned into a glowing highlighter yellow. *Have to make it obvious* . The soldier cooed with awe, their eyes bright with wonder. If only she could see magic that way again. What she would give to forget the horrors that awaited that bright excited child.

As the soldier began examining their own cloak, she noticed there were no more laughs.

She turned to see faces fixed with emotions ranging from revulsion to awe. If she looked closer she could see that most were around her age.

More kids to fight grown people's wars. *Merlin, it just sucks to be anywhere, doesn't it?*

And as if he were Merlin himself, the short man appeared by her side to pluck the wand straight from her fingers. In a not-so-hot moment

for her, she let out an involuntary whimper. I mean, it was as if the baby she'd just birthed was taken away from her. Pathetic, she scolded herself. *You're better than this; c'mon, chin up, back straight.*

She watched as he examined the wand, then promptly handed it back to the now Highlighter yellow clad soldier. *Now how did he expect for me to turn it back to green?*

She internally rolled her eyes. *It was their problem now.*

In a bout of understandable curiosity, the goggled soldier pointed the wand at themselves in an attempt to revert their cloak from yellow to green. Their pronunciation got very close, but it wouldn't matter either way if they were muggles.

She smirked and made sure the hooded man saw as the soldier handed Hermione's wand back to her. She stared at the precious stick of wood and slowly pointed it at the soldier's cloak.

Hermione didn't need a translator to know what they were asking for. So she quickly cast another *Colovaria* ; and after carefully eyeing the others' cloaks, deemed it to be perfect and hesitantly handed her wand back to them.

They took one last look at the thing before placing it into their bag. *Bye bye, wand.*

For the majority of the rest of the walk, she was silent. Others made what sounded like small talk or orders around her, but she couldn't be fully sure.

As dawn passed and the light of the sun stretched over their heads, the forest began to thin and the tall trees turned into thick shrubs. The warmth of her trench coat began to weigh on her and her feet ached in her combat boots. *Merlin, how much longer?*

Finally they came to a clearing on a hill where on the other side sat an *absolutely gigantic* wall and a little town right beneath it. "Holy

shit," she sighed. If that was where they were heading, they had a lot more to go and her feet began to ache even more at the thought. However, instead of trekking further, the group began to mount their horses. *Thank Merlin! But then where would she ride?*

Her question was answered when the short, hooded man took her by her waist- and with a surprising amount of strength- planted her on the saddle in front of him. Without a word of warning, the horse began to move at full gallop and she leaned forward to hold on to the horse's neck.

As they neared the town, she realized it was desolate and demolished. Who could've done this? Had it been the people she was currently riding with... or their enemy instead?

The group was nearly at the wall when a man- presumably the blonde leader from earlier began to shout orders. When people began to *stand up* on their horses, she got worried. When they began to *fly up*- with the use of wires, which she'd make sure to ask about later- she became inconsolable. *I'm gonna have to go up there with them, aren't I. Bugger that, I'd rather-*

"Euhhhhaahhhhhh!"

She could faintly hear him scoff in disgust, which instantly made her want to drop kick him off a cliff. But she held her tongue till they reached the top where she was forced to sit next to their blonde leader and their surrounding officers.

So there she sat- scared shitless at the top of a gigantic wall. She was way too high for her liking. Even worse than the height itself were the lack of railings, bars, *anything* in case of an accident. *More like in case of an accident involving me.*

Merlin, they should've just blindfolded me.

But because they hadn't, anything that they did was up for analysis.

They all had things to do and it seemed like an operation of some kind. Everyone was seen to be dispersing to certain fixed locations. Except for another man next to the blonde and in the distance, a soldier holding their sword up to gain the attention of said leader. *He must've found something- or had a better plan. Whatever it was, it must've been big to disobey orders like that.*

They seemed frightened as they ran up to their leader. *They're so pretty.* Before speaking, their eyes flickered to her nervously- *they're so... so blue.* She'd of course seen blue eyes before- she'd been seeing them on Ron for nearly a decade- but none of them had looked like theirs. No, never had blue eyes reminded her of the sea like these had.

Memories of her and her parents at Plage des Grands Sables came to mind, causing her to melt with euphoric bliss. She smiled. It'd be a shame if that soldier died today. She'd like to look into their eyes again, if only just to see her parents in that untainted memory.

After their conversation, the leader gave them a single nod. In dismissal? Approval? With no understanding of the language she didn't know. But before the soldier turned to leave, they flashed her a look of fond confusion, though after, it was filled with firm determination. *Why had they given me that look- wait, am I still smiling?*

She was.

Too embarrassed, she looked away as they jumped off the wall and onto the other side.

If she didn't know any better, she'd say it was a go for suicide. For her sake, she hoped not.

She stared up at the two men who'd shifted their attention from the young soldier to watching the other wall. From where she sat, she could see a huge hole in the middle of the wall.

Had someone invaded their city? But then why do something now; this must've been demolished at least a couple years ago.

Were they the invaders, because what were less than 500 *soldiers* going to do in an empty city?

No time for unanswerable questions Hermione, think of things you can answer, like who are the leaders.

Well, with the way the hierarchy was set so far, she would guess the blonde was the Commanding Officer and the brunette next to him, his second in command, though- that could've been the short man as well.

After a few moments of tense conversation between the two men... her "guards" at the moment, there was a large explosion at the other wall across from them. It was an odd looking explosion- if it even was that, but what else could it be?

But yellow lightning...? From an explosive...? This seemed far beyond the capabilities of muggles.

She sighed, she could be patient, she could wait for those answers. And it seemed like she'd be getting them sooner or later, because no one seemed worried. In fact, they seemed to be incredibly relieved more than anything else.

She craned her neck to see the damage that'd been done to the wall, but she had found none. Though, a certain section did look a bit more odd compared to rest. That was the section that had just a second ago been a gaping hole in the middle of the wall!

How could people who ride horses into battle fix an infrastructure problem, *that large*, in one second?

If these weren't muggles and they weren't wizards... then what were they?

She heard the now familiar zip of wires- someone was coming. She was a bit startled to see the same soldier from before- *oh, they're blond.*

Didn't notice, did ya? Probably cause you were too busy mooning at their-

She needed to focus, focus on the situation at hand... and not the pretty soldier that's eyes remind her of her-

Ugh, snap out of it.

They were speaking urgently, and the two men's responses deemed that whatever that soldier had found had been very disturbing.

Though they seemed young, their words held a lot of weight with the two men. *T hey must've been a damn good soldier or a person of high social standing to be on such speaking terms with these senior officers.*

The blond commander was now calling for reinforcements. Something other than the fixed hole in the wall must've happened. Something bad if she were to guess.

They gathered around the blonds, and after a while, a couple of them started demanding things from the younger of the two. After a beat, they answered in a way that seemed like- *they were giving orders.* Maybe they were the commander's kid? But her thoughts were interrupted as the group went their separate ways.

With nothing new coming in to stimulate and distract her, she began to tense. All this waiting under a very obviously volatile situation was making her itch. Should she be doing something? She felt like she should be doing something.

Finally, a flare went off and the group regathered at the wall only to start shouting at each other. It seemed like infighting. *Uh oh.*

Then a second flare went up, a red one. After a few words from blond numero uno, blond number two- who was much more confident- gave their orders and the group dispersed with shouts of affirmation once again.

If only I had my wand so I could understand. But was it worth breaking the little trust they had in her now? No, not now at least.

She was shaken from her thoughts by the sound of commotion going on on the side of the wall.

What -

Another explosion interrupted her thoughts. And unlike the first explosion, this response seemed to be full of fear and worry. *What was going on?* It was making her itchy with unwanted memories; even her head was beginning to pound, the stress of explosions from a different war weighing her down.

But ever the hero, she instantly thought of how she could aid in the situation. Her hands shook as she fought the will to fight.

Right now, I am just a prisoner. I do not need to fight.

How that was supposed to be reassuring, she didn't know.

But was there even something she *could* do? And would helping them without knowing their motivations only succeed in bringing upon more evil onto the world? And anyways, they seemed to be alone on that wall, why be scared of one explosion and not the other? They sounded exactly the same to her- looked the same too. Again, what kind of bombs- or whatever they were- create lightning like that? *Either this is a different world or muggles have just weaponized orange lightning.*

But she had no more time to dwell on possible muggle technologies because a wave of similar explosions set off in the distance.

From the direction they came from.

The response this time was even more fearful.

I need my wand, I need my wand or I'm going to die, I need my wand or we're all going to die-

The ball of tension in her body pulsed until she knew: *I can't keep playing prisoner like this.*

She wandlessly broke off her restraints and despite the protests and physical attempts to subdue her, she summoned her wand ready to fight off anyone, if need be, to survive.

She was existing off pure adrenaline. The mantra of *live, live, live* kept repeating in her mind till it was all she heard. She hadn't even realized it's physical effects. She looked crazed and feral; even her hair had escaped her bun, frizzing and crackling with magical energy. Gone were her dark brown eyes- now they glowed, flickering between a warm amber to a striking gold.

She hadn't even realized that soldiers began backing away in caution.

With only a second to determine her true enemies, she found them, the source of everyone's fear was...

A fucking Monkey?!

In the distance, the huge ape-like beast contorted it's body like that of a pitcher's- she didn't even have the time to question why or what it was bloody doing there- *and oh shit, it's gonna throw something, it's gonna throw a bloody fucking bomb at us and kill us all, it's-*

Mind distorted with fear and adrenaline, with not a care at all that she was standing on top of a *50 meter wall*, she rushed to edge; thinking of the best possible spell to ward off a bomb- but with no time and

the projectile coming closer, she shouted the first thing that came to mind, "PROTEGO MAXIMA!"

Her urgency, her fear, her need to protect- the emotional weight of her words fueled its potency and the oncoming- *oh my, was it just a rock?* - rock shattered at first contact with her shield. But like Newton said, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction," and her body was blown off the wall.

Author's Note:

The main AOT Protagonists Ages are aged up three years. EX: Armin, Mikasa, and Eren are 18. Levi, Hange, and Erwin stay the same. Hermione is 20 in this.

The topic of gender is seen through the lense of whoever's POV. Hermione may not be the best interpreter for gender as she's from the 90's- she's better at understanding sexual orientations.

Comments and criticisms keep me motivated, so do that if you can. I will also take requests for headcanons within the Universe.

I have not yet made up my mind on other ships other than Armin x Hermione, but I will not accept Historia with anyone other than Ymir- so feel free to tell me which other ships you want to see within this universe.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Okay, *nearly* blown off the wall.

It was only because of one of the soldiers- who had blocked her near descent off the edge- that she didn't drop 50 meters to her death. Her mind was still out of it by the time she got up- however, not enough to make her forget her manners. So as she passed, she gave the kind soldier a simple nod in thanks.

Turning to keep an eye out for the apeman, she watched as leftover debris from the defensive spell fell from the sky onto the rundown town- *and we're those giants next to him? No time for rhetorical questions*, she needed to fight.

Head clearing from the aftermath, Hermione could faintly hear the same blond man "guarding" her on the roof shouting from a distance.

Body still flushed with adrenaline, she rushed to him while casting a translating spell to understand.

"-Humanity or Titans!- *Were those things "Titans" then? Were they their enemy?*

Looks could always be deceiving... But then again, Voldemort was one ugly bastard, and he was evil to the core.

"-Which side will live?! Which side will perish?!"

Well certainly not me, not if I can help it.

A little winded but positively *vibrating* with energy she stopped at his side, ignoring the glare of Mr. Shortstop Uppity behind him, "Uh s-sir, ehem- I mean Sir." She straightened her back and looked him in the

eye. *Why do I always have to be so goddamn eager-to-please with authority figures?*

"I have two more of those left in me. After that, I'll be limited to menial spells, better for close contact, healing, or show." Her eyes darted to the ape-like Titan that was about to pick up another rock, "Should I..." she began to face the Titan, wand raised in preparation when he stopped her. "No. Let it fall. He wasn't aiming for us, he was aiming to block the hole below us."

Damn, then some of the horses would be stuck and they'd never have a fast enough exit for all of them. Apparating horses two by two seemed draining and meaningless if the Titan was still able to throw projectiles to kill said horses... Maybe a *bombarada* to the blockade... but that would serve futile as well, as the wall and the rock blocking their exit could react unpredictably. *Think, Hermione, think...*

That spell!

The spell that Professor Flitwick had used at the final battle! A powerful protection spell... and one that could hold its own, even after being cast... but could she manage it on her own? If she could just remember the exact order of the spell... then it'd be an option, but a weak one-

The wall shook as the Titan succeeded in what it had planned to do. But for any plan of *theirs* to succeed, they needed that Titan gone.

"If you're worried about the horses Sir, creating a semi-permanent protective barrier *is* possible... With that in mind, the horses don't have to be your first priority- I can handle the horses. Taking down that Titan over there, that's where you should focus your man power."

Mr. Uppity walked up to the Commander, "Erwin, he's starting to climb up." *Who's starting to climb up?* With just a few steps and a

craned neck, she noticed another Titan on the other side of the wall.
Oh- so we're surrounded.

What could I even do against that monstrosity- with both of those things . Would a Sectumsempra do the job or could she aid in trying to contain them instead?

And why were they all so damn calm right now?!

...

Oh right, they've probably trained for this.

She had to remind herself that this was not your regular muggle military. With that in mind, her nerves started to settle. They must have a plan for those things... *right?*

But as the wall shook from the Titan's running and Commander Erwin's shouting began, "All troops! Avoid clashing with the Armored Titan! Stay away from him!" her nerves started to act up again.

Should I-

Hermione hesitated before disappearing to another group of cloaked soldiers. Who'd just happened to be led by the goggled soldier.

Great.

But before they could ask any question she apparated further- and from her vantage point, she could see the "Armored Titan" steadily advancing up the wall.

Damn, should she come back and try to help or should she stay and follow orders from someone who was still at the same spot on the bloody wall!

Everyone else dispersed as commanded- albeit, not as far as she thought they would- except for Mr. Uppity, the young blond, and the

Commander. No, they hadn't moved an inch. She decided if they felt like they could evade last minute- then so could she.

She apparated back with a pop, just a few meters beside them. That caught the attention of the younger blond and the look on their face- in their eyes said it all. *They were planning something...*

Their blue eyes occasionally darted towards her, but they kept on with the conversation. *As long as they let me in on the plan beforehand, then we're good .*

They were discussing possible spies in and out of their ranks. However, they were cut off when the ape Titan let out a furious roar. Thinking it was getting ready for another aerial assault she tensed, but then realized it was sending off a line smaller Titans- *fuck, towards their other horses.*

Now when did I start thinking of myself to be included with those "theirs"? She shook her head, she needed to focus.

The spell; the spell used by Flitwick, was it *Protego Maxima Repello Inimicum Fianto Duri...* or *Protego Maxima Fianto Duri Repello Inimicum...*? At least her choices were narrowed down to two, but there could still be room for error.

"If you're worried about the horses, don't be. I got it."

The Commander looked to Mr. Uppity for their approval. *Oh bollocks,* that guy must be *important* important to garner that much respect.

Why's it always the mean ones?

Mr. Uppity nodded once and the Commander then nodded to her.

She sighed to herself. They were putting their trust in her blindly. They were putting their lives in her hands. She'd have to honor that. And she would, she'd have to.

The blond then called to the Commander, "Commander! The Armored Titan is close! And we still don't know where Berthold is!" *Berthold? Another question that she needed answers to.*

"Yeah, I know." *Huh?!*

With no other explanation she was left wondering, *what the hell were we supposed to do now?*

"Are you finally ready to say something? I could've had breakfast during the wait."

Exactly!

Huh, well maybe he isn't too bad...

"Dirk squad! Aid the Klaus squad and protect any horses nearing the edge of town. Marlene squad! Protect the horses near the gate. Any Titan within 10 meters of her- " he gestured to Hermione, "-is to be prioritized. After every 3 meter is gone, any squad members left are to regroup and aid in defeating the Beast Titan! Got it!"

With only a moment's hesitancy, the soldiers shouted affirmatively, "Roger!"

He went on to direct the other squads to defeat the "Armored Titan".

"-achieve your objectives, whatever it takes! This moment! This battle! The survival of humanity depends on it! One more for humanity, dedicate your hearts!"

With a "Yes Sir!" All the soldiers, except for "Levi" and "Armin"- though she didn't know which was which- were told to wait.

He began telling Mr. Uppity- who now had to be renamed Levi in her mind- to stay to kill the Beast Titan.

Getting the gist of the conversation, she began to apparate when the young blonde- *Armin* - stopped her.

"W-wait! There's something else you could help out with, if you're up for it?"

Hermione nodded, prompting them to continue, "You're able to travel instantaneously, would you be able to pop up behind the Beast Titan unnoticed... while carrying another person?"

Could she?

Yes. She'd apparated further than that before, but never in midair. She knew her cushioning spells, and disappearing midair was not off the table either. If her rushed calculations were correct, it'd be fine.

She nodded, "I can do it, no problem. It's just-" she turned to Levi, "I'd be dropping you midair and-"

"No need to worry about me." Okay... cocky son of a-

"Then once I finish the barrier, I'll apparate you behind-"

"-Behind his nape."

"Wait what?" He raised a brow at her like she had just proved him right.

Huh?

"It has to be behind his nape. That's the only way to incapacitate or kill a Titan." He looked at her curiously, as if her ignorance was a mild surprise. *How was I supposed to know! That's not common knowledge- but was it common knowledge here?*

Wherever here was...

"Alright then- I'll apparate you to his nape. I'll disapparate a safe distance away before taking you back here once you... finish the job. It will take some time for me to create an opening in the barrier that won't take down the whole thing, but I can- if need be. After that, you

can go back inside... and if you need to leave, you can do so no problem."

He nodded and without a word, swung down to the horses to help. *Well, that's that I guess.*

After realizing that Armin had already gone and that only the Commander was left standing on the wall- *he must have a reason for doing so, I won't interfere* - she apparated in front of the blocked entrance.

"Gather your horses and comrades at the edge of town, bring them back here! We don't want any stragglers!"

As a few soldiers nearby heeded her instructions she began the spell. She closed her eyes, *think of the Latin Hermione, it should form a coherent thought.*

It wouldn't be Protego Maxima Repello Inimicum Fianto Duri...

No- It'd be, "Protego Maxima Fianto Duri Repello Inimicum."

She chanted the words over and over again, wand pointed to the sky. She was only one person, but her intent was strong enough to substitute for the lack of casters.

Pulses of cool white light shot from her wand, the barrier stretching further and farther overhead.

She intended for it not to be a full dome either. Instead, she went for a more time and energy efficient form. Meaning that the barrier would be a small, half dome adjacent to the wall.

Though the structure was small and compact, she sweated bullets. *I really should've taken off my trench coat.* But there was no stopping now. Getting the job done was imperative. They entrusted their lives to her: an outsider, a stranger. They placed their lives in her hands.

And I won't let them down.

The reminder of her promise gave her a newfound strength. With just a little more left to go, the roars, the ground rumbling beneath her feet, and the screams from rocks being thrown in their direction vanished from her mind, leaving only a single thought: *Protego Maxima Fianto Duri Repello Inimicum, Protego Maxima Fianto Duri Repello Inimicum, Protego Maxima Fianto Duri Repello Inimicum*.

At last, Hermione was done. She collapsed to her knees, ready to pass out when Levi "magically" appeared by her side, "Oi. We're not done. Get up."

Unfortunately, she knew he was right and stood up to finish what she'd promised. "Just let me take off my coat- then we can go."

He nodded, "I'll need to be in front of you if you land facing his nape."

Afterwards, she stood behind him and awkwardly attempted at placing her hands around him.

"Just wrap them around my waist and jump already."

She huffed, "Fine, but be warned, the first jump is always the hardest."

"Tch, just jump. We don't have any time to waste." *True* .

So without further notice, she apparated to the edge of the barrier, "I need you to be familiar with how it feels, can't have you dying on me because you threw up midair."

"It was fine. I'm fine. Let's go," though he couldn't see it, she raised her brow at him in incredulity.

"Okay," she breathed. *Here goes nothing* .

With her target clear in front of them she apparated behind the still Titan's nape. Releasing Levi midair, she fell a bit before disappearing some distance behind.

This should be far enough .

Feeling a safe distance behind, she watched as Levi sliced at the Titan's body. Though gruesome, the way he butchered that ape Titan was strangely fascinating, but no less horrifying... and yet, it was almost distracting in a way...

Almost distracting enough that she *almost* didn't notice the quadrupled Titan running towards them at full speed. *Shit, he needs to get out of there now .*

And before she could really think about it, she apparated beside him, took one look at the half naked, dismembered man he was holding his sword in their mouth to and apparated them both to the wall.

A little peace offering, she thought- he gets to finish him off without getting himself killed in the process.

She felt a hot, burning sensation on her back, like being too close to a fire and with the threat from one side of the wall practically defeated, she turned her sights to the other where- *holy shit .*

That- that thing was like 50 meters tall! No- taller!

It was currently emitting a massive wave of heat and smoke from its body. *What was it trying to do?* From what she could see, there was no one in front of it that needed confronting.

After hearing a couple explosions- very different from the ones she'd heard before- she turned her sights to the Armored Titan kneeling with a person in its mouth. *Oh no .* She took a step towards them to apparate but stopped as another explosion exploded from its mouth, incapacitating the damn thing. *Ah, I see.*

She turned back to the giant one and noticed it had stopped emitting heat. *What then? Should I-*

She spotted a body falling to the ground. They seemed unresponsive, unable or unwilling to use their wires to break their fall.

Leaving Levi with the Commander, she estimated where they would land and apparated somewhere below them. She whispered, "*Arresto Momentum*," to slow down their fall. Once she could accurately pinpoint their landing zone, she cast a cushioning charm to soften their fall.

But as the body got closer she realized she was too late; their body had been burnt to a blackened crisp. *All that for just one person? But why?*

She was stopped from her questioning by the quaking ground. It's falling! And luckily, not near them either.

She returned her attentions back to the body in front of her. She placed one hand at their mouth to check for breathing and the other on their heart. *They're alive!... They're alive and in extreme pain...*

Her eyes became blurry with unshed tears. All this pain, always pain. Merlin, what should she do?

At that point, she didn't know if it'd be more merciful to euthanize them or resuscitate them. Before making a decision that, frankly, didn't concern her- she, at least, tried to make them more comfortable. "Hey, um hello. I'm going to try and help you, okay? To ease your pain, I'm- I'm Hermione by the way."

With shaky hands, she first placed another cushioning charm underneath them- *the shingles on this roof must've been digging into their skin. Can't have that.*

Then she placed a cooling charm on their entire body and she heard a small sigh of relief. "Good, good," her heart warmed, *it was working* . "Lenio," she whispered to relieve them of at least some of their pain. She rubbed at her eyes. Maybe it was the exhaustion or a

trick of the mind, but she could've sworn she'd seen a bit of tension leave their shoulders.

If they did die, at least it wouldn't be in excruciating pain, just the regular kind. *Now was not a good time for "wit", Hermione .*

She heard the zip of wires before setting her eyes on a dark haired boy around her age carrying a dismembered body. What was with these men and dismembered bodies- *Were Titans just humans- No time for questions, there's a person right in front of you.*

He looked defeated despite presumably defeating the most menacing thing here. *Oh- he was looking at the burned body. They must've been close .*

She cast a translation spell before whispering, "They're still alive," she looked up from the body to look them in the eye, "It's your call what you think we should do, you obviously know them."

They began to tear up as they let out a strangled gasp, "Th-they're alive?"

She nodded, eyes beginning to water again.

He rushed up to her, pleadingly, dismembered man in tow, "You *must* get to Captain Levi, tell him Eren needs him to bring the serum. He'll know what to do."

She nodded, afraid that anything she might say would come out as choked sobs.

She disapparated to the top of the wall when she found only the Commander and a few others guarding the man that Levi had dismembered, but no Levi. The man looked very much alive despite being dismembered... *Why are they keeping him alive?* She took a deep breath before hardening her face, "Sir, Sir!" she called out to the Commander, "Where's Levi? I need him."

"He's back on the side you came from, you can probably spot him from up here."

"Thank you," she bobbed her head to him in gratitude and began her search for him down below. She could see him swinging towards where other soldiers and the Armored Titan layed. She could also see the four-legged Titan close by. *Shit* . She apparated near where she thought he'd land next. "Levi!"

He stopped, "What?"

"The four-legged one is close, be careful," he shot Hermione an annoyed glare as if *she* was the condescending one. She sighed, "Someone named Eren also said that they needed you, they needed you to bring the serum."

" *Shit*," he looked conflicted, "Where are they?"

"Next to the remains of the giant Titan, over there," she pointed back towards the wall.

"I'm more needed here. Here," he handed her a metal box, eyeing her speculatively, "They'll know what to do with it."

She received the box with care and nodded. "Now go!" *Merlin* . She popped back next to the burned body and their friend.

"Here-" she handed him the box, "He said he can't be here right now, but this is the serum."

He bowed his head and thanked her profusely before opening up the box to reveal a medical syringe. *What's this supposed to help with?*

He checked his friend's pulse before taking the syringe and injecting them with all of the serum.

"You might want to step away for this, and maybe not look while you're at it," he said despondently. *What?*

Then, before her eyes, that once burned-beyond-repair body turned into a 5 meter giant. Eren took a few steps back before preparing to swing away, "We need to go." Sensing the worry in his voice, she followed him, then noticed he had left behind the dismembered man on the roof, "W-wait, you forgot about the-" he shot her a look as he swung that said: *don't ask about it* .

So she didn't, and apparated next to him on a nearby rooftop.

Something was severely off about that Titan, but they were all odd looking- hell, there was even one that looked like an ape. So why did it irk her so much? She shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts. But no amount of shaking could clear the confusion she felt in that moment.

Why would turning them into a Titan be preferable to death?

She heard wires zipping as the Titan began to move, *more people were here- acknowledge them.*

But even the thumps of multiple people landing on the roof couldn't pry her eyes away from the lumbering giant that was crawling towards the dismembered man. *W-wait. What is it- why is it-?*

Though, when the screaming began as the blond giant went to grab for the man, she found it hard to look. Just the screams alone: *haunting* . They reminded her of her own that night, that night at Malfoy Manor. *Is this why they were keeping the man on the roof alive? Were they going to keep repeating this process?*

"Everyone! Help me!" But when she felt no one move from their spots she took a step towards the gruesome scene. However, an arm blocked her way. She sent an incredulous look to the one stopping her, the dark haired friend- Eren. Though he showed remorse, his face was filled with determination, "This needs to happen." *Does it?*

She looked at the eerily familiar Titan then to the soldiers behind her. The look on everyone's faces made her hesitate, but she shoved his arm away anyways, "Why—" the sound of bones crunching and squelching flesh stopped her mid-sentence.

She looked back to where the man was currently being consumed. *It was too late. I was too late... if only I hadn't hesitated I could've- why did I hesitate?*

She couldn't move, even as the soldiers behind her began to swing towards the now immobilized Titan.

She was usually so good at this: always moving, always thinking, always pushing through... *but this was different.*

She fell to her knees as she watched them pull someone out of the Titan's nape.

She gave a short gasp.

It was *them* . *Armin* . The boy with the ocean blue eyes. The ones that she had *longed* to see again...

And they just ate another person alive...

Author's Note:

Just to clarify, if you see a regular word in the middle of an italicized sentence(which means it's an inner thought in first person) that word should be emphasized.

Thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed my first chapter. Seeing them made me so happy! If you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox. But to the guests:

Enileve: Thanks so much for liking it! Hope you enjoy the chapters to come

Chapter 3

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Hermione did *not* trust herself with apparating- that she wouldn't splinch herself in the process. So, she opted for awkwardly climbing down the side of the house instead. And after landing on shaky legs, she walked to where she knew they had gathered- her every step stiff and controlled.

She felt conflicted.

These people had just been complicit in live cannibalism... *and not blinked an eye*. Though, some could argue, so had she...

So then, what was her problem? Why was she so absolutely gobsmacked by the sometimes necessary horrors of war? And hadn't she already deemed them to not be bloodthirsty, rash individuals?

She clenched her fists, squeezing the base of her wand in the process. Or was it that she was just conflicted in *her own* part to play? That she was projecting the disgust she felt for herself onto these soldiers she had little to no information on.

But she still had to ask herself, was her decision to fight with these soldiers misguided by familiarity and a lack of contextual knowledge, or had she just sided with a military that'd been forced to play dirty to survive?

And these Titans... Some were obviously more cognitive than others... So was this then similar to lycanthropy? Could she have been complicit and active in demonizing an entire group of "monster-looking" people for something they couldn't control?

Let's hope not because- because... Well, what could she do, really?

Not much in these circumstances.

She had no political power, no background knowledge, and no "ambassadorial immunity" to keep her alive if she were to publicly condemn them. *I'll just have to bite my tongue and keep moving. Like how I'm doing now.*

She slowed her pace just before having to turn around the corner. What would she see? How would she interact with them when this was all said and done?

She forced herself to unclench her fists.

These were kids too, she reminded herself- kids who've probably lived a gruesome life- a cruel life to be fighting like this. She sighed and messaged her scarred arm. Circumstances are different in times of war Hermione, you should know that by now .

So she turned, making an effort to leave all unwarranted misgivings, judgments, and prejudices behind. And she was glad she did because she practically melted on the spot.

They were gathered around him- *Armin*- crying with such relief and joy that it overwhelmed her. She smiled solemnly as she held back tears, the sight before her being too precious.

She stepped back, allowing them this private moment after such a hellish ordeal.

After leaving their sights, she leaned her head back against the wall and closed her eyes. Tears fell, framing her cheeks. *Harry, Ron, everyone... will I see you soon?*

She hoped so, she hoped to Merlin she would.

Though she'd been a workaholic, she'd always made sure to spend time with them. However, with conflicting schedules and stressful jobs, it was hard. *I haven't seen them in weeks*, she wiped the tears

off her cheeks and sniffed to stop her runny nose. Hopefully, she'd see them soon... *hopefully*.

Trying to find tasks that would distract her, she placed her hair back in a bun. It was a bit messy for her tastes but it'd do. She noticed how dirty her clothes were and wrinkled her nose in distaste, "Scourgify," *there, that was better*.

Now, where did I leave my trench coat- Oh-

She thought of summoning it but quickly remembered the barrier. She would take it down when she got her jacket.

That'd be in a while though... And she was exhausted. The adrenaline had finally worn off and she barely had anything left in her. *I won't even be able to cast a translation spell, will I?*

No.

She sighed, sliding down the wall to take a much-needed seat. *Maybe if I just rest my eyes for a bit...*

"-das alles bis zur Erschöpfung getan hat, das ist viel für einen Fremden. Sie ist entweder zu nett für ihr eigenes Wohl oder sie versucht, etwas zu gewinnen-

She woke to the sound of murmured talking in the distance. She chuckled, "You guys can't keep breaking into my flat like this..." she groaned into her arm being used as a pillow. She winced, noticing that her bed was particularly stiff today, "You guys?"

She opened her eyes to the blinding light of the sun. "Ugh, wha-"
Oh-

She internally lamented at her reality. She was still here, it was all real... *Merlin, what was happening to her?*

Once they realized she was awake, they gathered around her curiously. She peeled the blanket- that they'd most probably placed

on her- off to her waist. *That was actually super sweet of them.* She then sat up so that she could be more comfortable when talking to them; *they placed me on a bedroll too...*

Cute...

With the cloaks shed and the adrenaline of battle gone, she could finally see what these soldiers' uniforms were. But to be honest, other than the pants and the... weirdly bondage like leather harnesses- *probably to help with the swinging* - there was no uniformity. *Odd.*

When they started talking but she couldn't understand, she was reminded of the absence of her wand. She panicked for only a millisecond before realizing it was right next to her. *Whew.*

Refreshed from her nap, she was able to perform the necessary charm to communicate.

Now that the battle was over, the soldiers surrounding her seemed more relaxed and closer to their actual ages. Their eyes were wide and quite childlike as she stared up at them. Feeling like a specimen again, she squirmed uncomfortably.

She chuckled awkwardly, fiddling with her wand, "I can understand now. What were you saying?"

A bald-headed boy managed to speak first, "Why is your skin so dark?"

Hermione was so flabbergasted that her mouth hung wide open. She was so taken aback that she had to mentally tell herself to close it again.

So that's why they kept examining her- they'd never seen a "black" person before...

After years in the Wizarding World, the muggle construct of race rarely affected her; especially since she'd "left" the muggle world after "losing" her parents.

She felt a split second of shame at not being proactive enough in the muggle communities that also needed her help. Lamely, she realized that their issues became easy to ignore after having gone the last few years with no racially charged comments or micro-aggressions.

If I get back- when I get back, I'll do better.

"The lady can do magic and you ask about her skin?!" Ranted a sandy, brown-haired boy with an undercut. *Right?*

The bald-headed boy raised his hands defensively, "What? I was curious."

"So were we, but doesn't the magic seem a tad more important?" Eren cut in.

"Not really," the boy shrugged.

Before the banter- no matter how entertaining- could continue, she butt in. "Like," she exhaled to release the tension, "like why do- you've never seen skin like this before?"

The bald-headed boy shook his head "no" and so did a few others.

"Oh wow, *oh wow*. Um- well, I was born like this and so were my parents and their parents before them. It's genetic and perfectly normal where I'm from." *Normal to sane people, I should say.* Racists were a *whole 'nother breed.*

"What about your hair, that's different too," he pointed out. Hermione began to nervously play with the ends of her curls, hyper-aware of its current uniqueness.

"Yes, that generally comes with the dark skin. At least in that-" *Okay "Brightest Witch of your Age", let's try and give an actual good*

rundown on history and genetics.

She sighed. "This world is so large and filled with all different types of living environments that in order to survive, Homosapiens or "humans" had to physically adapt to them..."

Noticing some confused stares, she decided to start from the start, "Let's go back a little further. Long ago, let's say... 200,000? 300,000 years ago-"

"What!" "HUH?!" "Wait- really?" "No way!"

"Three *hundred* THOUSAND?!" Hermione jumped at the sound of the goggled soldier, now with a bandage wrapped around one of their eyes- she'd have to check up on that later, probably soon. The goggled soldier exercised their seniority by smushing in between two other soldiers directly in front of Hermione.

She nodded to placate them, "No, it's true. The Earth is old, much older than a measly 300,000 years. It's billions of years old. We are but a spec in its timeline." She sighed and looked to the sky. It all seemed so meaningless laid out like that. What was her century of life to the Earth's billions?

Meaningful. It meant her life- her choices held meaning.

Trying not to get too existential, she continued, "Anyways, yes- 300,000 years ago, different species of humans existed in the same way that different types of birds exist now. Now, humanity as you know it is largely descended from one of those species- Homosapiens- while the rest remain extinct. Remnants of those species can be found in certain types of modern humans- like you'd," she gestured to all of them, "well except you," she added sheepishly to the one Asian of the group, "would probably be able to discover some Neanderthal ancestry, even though you're most definitely Homosapiens."

She turned to address the Asian girl sitting by her.

Hermione hadn't noticed at first, but while she had talked, the group had sat down around her, raptly listening to her story. "If you looked back far enough, you'd probably find some Homoerectus in your ancestry."

The group looked at the Asian girl in awe, especially Eren, "Mikasa," he breathed in astonishment. Guessing from their ignorance on black people, there probably wasn't too much they knew about her either. *Until now.*

"Okay, so you're probably wondering why we're the only ones left... Well, that's because we were the smartest. Our brains were shaped differently, you see. The parts that controlled language and memory- which are situated at the front of the brain- were bigger in comparison to the other species. In the end, it was intelligence that led us to survive, not the larger builds and strength like that of our counterparts."

She smirked to herself. Though she did feel bad that people had to die just because their environment deemed them not worthy enough, it helped reaffirm her own basic philosophy. That intelligence truly was of value and should be cultivated not only for survival, but for success.

"This species of human, around 60,000 years ago began migrating out of a place called Africa and- would maps be more helpful? Did she even have a world map? She did! In the "Magical History: A Comprehensive Guide of Different Magics" book she'd left in her tent about a year ago.

So in that moment, she made a split-second decision. She put a finger up to signal for them to wait, "Accio beaded bag." It took a second but her bag finally whizzed between the heads of two people before landing in her hand. She opened her bag and began looking.

As she was rummaging through for her tent, she jumped at the sound of Levi's voice behind her. "Gee, that's one pretty story," he

said in a complete monotone. The group scrambled up, though some more elegantly than others.

Merlin, he's like a freaking ninja or something. "Oi brats, why didn't anyone alert the Commander that she was awake? We need this barrier taken down already." *Right, almost forgot about that.*

"Tch. So distracted that you didn't even notice your friend woke up."

The group screamed in equal parts horror and delight. They came and surrounded the fully healed blond, asking all types of questions and filling him in on anything he'd missed. Despite it all, his Ocean eyes kept flickering to her in equal parts awe and hunger. But it was a different kind of hunger; the familiar kind. The kind she'd see in a mirror before reading a book or attending a class.

It was the hunger for knowledge.

And with that, she wondered if he was the same kind of danger as well... if he was the brainy one, the planner- if he was intelligent, yet unassuming in their ability for moral flexibility. And if he was, then maybe *that* was why he was a lone target for the giant Titan...

She attempted to scrutinize him further through whatever glances she could steal.

Hermione noticed that he was no longer wearing a hood and that his hair was showing- a blonde bob with bangs. Hermione was surprised with herself. She found she quite liked the cut on him... It somehow... suited him...

"We'll have to reschedule your story for another time, but best believe- you *will* finish it." Hermione nodded and even though his eyes were set on the horizon, she sensed he knew she had.

He sighed, "Time to get up, lazy ass. You've got a barrier to take down." She spluttered at the epithet. "Excuse you! I happen to be very proactive," she sniffed.

The corner of his lip upturned ever so slightly, "Then why are you still on your ass."

Normally, Hermione had a proclivity towards kissing the butts of authority figures- but this guy danced a *little* too close to Severus Snape territory for her comfort.

"Oh you," she said in exasperation. Even so, she hurriedly got up before realizing how undignified she looked and slowed down the rest of her journey.

She dusted off any dirt or dust left on her from napping, though it wasn't much due to her earlier use of "Scourgify" . He probably noticed this since he wore a speculative look behind his monotone expression.

He narrowed his eyes at her, "How'd you get so clean, Lazy ass."

She scoffed, "Magic," she dignified him with neither an explanation nor further response. But to show off a little, she cast the spell on him, thus making his clothes, gear, and body become speck-free.

He visibly became more relaxed and even though he didn't thank her, she felt his gratitude from the way he shut up. Or, at least, that's how *she* interpreted it.

He wore a slight smirk as she continued rummaging through her bag. She still needed her tent; the book that mentioned the counter-curse was still in there. *Aha!*

When she had realized that she'd be spending more time outdoors for extended amounts of time, she'd spruced up and renovated the tent. A once barren, bare necessities abode became a fully furnished flat with a mini library and functioning bathroom. She gasped. What if she landed in a place with no modern bathrooms. *Dodged that bullet...*

Levi glared at her, suspicious. She waved him off, "Just worried about bathrooms." He eyed her as if she were crazy.

She rolled her eyes at his strangely expressive, non-expressive face. She pulled out the misshapen canvas that would soon be a tent and set it on the ground. She pointedly ignored the eyes curiously and carefully watching her. "*Eructo*," she cast and, now, before her stood an upright tent.

She heard a couple oohs and ahs and looked to their origin. They looked at the tent hungrily. Deciding to be kind and benevolent and merciful, she allowed them a look inside.

"Well, come in then- no time to waste. You'll have to come right back out of course... and *no peeking* when I'm away."

"And how is "us" being packed into a tent going to help you take down the barrier," he said in obvious disgust. Whether it was directed at the thought of her or the thought of being packed in a tent... she didn't know.

Already walking towards its entrance she said, "First of all, we won't be packed. Second of all, I need a book in there to be able to take down the barrier. I don't remember the exact incantation."

He nodded stiffly and followed her inside... along with a few others, not excluding Armin and Commander Erwin.

She took a deep breath once inside, breathing in its familiar and comfortable sights. She went straight for the large bookcase and began her search, but it wasn't hard since she kept it fairly organized... fairly.

"How did all of this... fit into your little bag," said the now familiar voice of the goggled soldier. While flipping through the book, she casually answered, "Magic," as she did not have an appropriate response that didn't go into the depths of Magical Theory.

When she found the right page and memorized the spell she shut the book and put it back in its place.

"Alright, you can stop the ogling. I've found the book, we can all leave, though I *can* always take you on a tour later... but you'll have to earn those privileges." When she barely saw any movement, she began to get more insistent. "Out, out. All of you. You're blocking the entrance and I *must* handle the barrier."

With the way they were lingering she just knew she had to put a couple (harmless) anti-muggle defense charms on the tent... just in case.

Once out, she cast the appropriate spells and once satisfied apparated to the edge of the barrier. With her wand touching the barrier, she focused on the meaning of the words and with a weighted whisper spoke the spell. A small crack formed from the origin of her wand meeting the barrier. The cracks stretched around the barrier until it finally collapsed into thousands of harmless magical shards.

After checking that the job was all done, she *acciod* her trench coat and stuffed it in her beaded bag. Then, she apparated back to the wall to find a bunch of soldiers trying to step within two meters of the tent.

She eyed them as she stepped past the barrier and into the tent. She needed to check if all her Wolfsbane Potions ingredients were alright, she couldn't be stuck here and not do her work. Pleased that they were all in good condition she decided she could leave the tent.

When Hermione stepped out of the opening she noticed a small crowd had gathered near the entrance. "Yeah, that won't work. Everybody, back away from the tent."

She dismantled the wards, "*Deripio*," she pointed to the tent, which then promptly turned back into a pile of canvas.

After stuffing in her bag she theatrically dusted off her hands and even picked some imaginary lint from her shoulders. Then she tried to look as disappointed as possible, "Maybe another time."

Noticing the absence of the Commander, Levi, and even the goggled soldier, she asked around.

Some flat out ignored her- though, they would sneak glances at her appearance. Others would splutter trying to come up with an answer. *Must be important if they don't trust me with it .*

Finally, the sandy, brown-haired boy from before answered her, "It's to retrieve some important information, that's all you need to know."

She nodded gratefully. Seeing as that was all she was getting she thought of how she could be productive. She scoffed internally. *Me, a lazy ass? If only he knew how wrong he'd been.*

She pulled out two small bottles of brown liquid and a mesh bag of dark green leaves. Anything Dittany related was quite expensive, she hoped her use of it, today, was worth it.

"Can you take me towards the injured, I can help," she dangled the goods she'd taken from her beaded bag in front of him.

"Really?" He eyed her up and down.

She sighed, "Yes really, so can you please show me your injured- you know what it's fine, I can just-"

"Alright, alright, let's go- but you're healing my friend first." He began walking.

"Okay," she shrugged, following him. She didn't mind.

The walk was short but he managed to squeeze in an introduction. "I'm Jean. I know you introduced yourself last night, but it's kind of hard to remember a name under such a stressful situation."

"Oh- um yeah, I'm Hermione. Thank you for introducing yourself." He gave a shrug as he replied, "No problem, I guess."

They stopped in front of a brown-haired girl with a ponytail and the bald-headed boy from before by her side. She was laying on a bedroll- the same kind Hermione had woken up in, the same kind being used by all the *other* injured soldiers around her as well.

The girl already had bandages placed on her forehead and chest, and her face was scrunched in pain as she slept.

Jean knelt next to her with worry on his face, "Sasha, hey. Someone's here to help alright, you'll be right as rain in no time." He smiled sadly then straightened his face, "Go ahead."

She nodded in acknowledgment to the bald boy by her side before humming a "yes" and getting to work. She knelt and peeled back the blanket to examine the severity of her patient. "*Lenio*," she casted before she started to heal. It would relieve her of most of her pain. Some tension left her face and shoulders. Okay, first she needed to take off her bandages to place the Essence of Dittany.

Once the bandages were gone she strategically dropped the Essence onto their wounds. Watching them heal she placed a bandaging charm on them to redress the wounds. She looked up at Jean. "It's not fully healed, but it'll definitely heal faster than before... I'd say she has three hours before it's fully healed."

His hardened face softened and he nodded, "Thank you." She looked to the bald boy to see tears in his eyes, "Thank you." She smiled and nodded.

Hermione stood up to continue her work on the others. She was pleased to note that there weren't too many that were injured and that their injuries were within her body expertise. Though there was a notable difference in the number of soldiers, the mood of the camp wasn't too down. *It must've not been that bad then...*

She was on her 17th patient before she heard the many steps of a group approaching behind her. *Who was it this time?*

Before she could place one more drop on the soldier before her, the bottle of Essence she held was swiftly taken away. *Oh, it's Levi and co.*

"Yes?" She turned to look at him. Irritated, she crossed her arms, "That's very expensive you know, I'd like it back."

"What is it," he said, examining the bottle and ignoring her.

She huffed, "It's Essence of *Dittany* - from the leaf, *Dittany*," she dangled her bag of Dittany leaves towards his face.

He snatched that too, though he handed it to the goggles soldier to examine. He then handed the Essence to Commander Erwin.

She didn't want to look like a child reaching for a toy out of their reach so she sat and waited patiently for their verdict.

"On your ass again?" He smirked just to toy with her. *That son of a...*

Her hair frizzled in indignation, proofing around her like halo, "Oh, I'll have you know that I have never slacked a day in my life." She pouted, despite herself. "I'm quite the workaholic you know."

"Unlikely," he replied in a monotone.

She almost laid down in defeat before noting the eyes of the younger soldiers watching the whole conversation in awe. *Huh? Anyways... .*

"So, think I'm poisoning your soldiers or what?"

"I can confirm this is Dittany, but certainly a different variation than ours. We still don't know it's properties and well- your magic could've tampered with its original state," they studied the leaves greedily. *They just wanted to keep the bag!*

"You know there are easier ways to kill people," she murmured without thinking.

"I know," she gawked at his bluntness.

Frustrated with the direction that this was going, she stood up to at least gain some authority in the conversation. Realizing she was still shorter than him, she conjured a stepping stool and stood on it. Smirking, she looked down at him, though he only rolled his eyes at her. *Ugh, not the response I was looking for .*

But before things could escalate, Commander Erwin butt in, "Let her continue, if we see any suspicious activity or development in the Scouts, we'll act. For now, let her be."

He looked at the position of the sun in the sky, then down at her, "When you finish, you'll be coming with us. Understood."

"Yes, sir," she awkwardly stepped down the stool she had, just a second ago, felt so confident standing on and vanished it from her sight.

She was trying to catch the goggled soldier's eye when, instead, her eyes had found Armin's. Ocean eyes stared at her in curiosity, horror, and amusement; though, if one looked close enough, a deep sadness had now burrowed its way deep into them.

Was it there before? No, she was sure of that. What was ailing him? Having been a Titan? Eating someone alive? Or learning that he did...

Moving her gaze from Armin to the older soldiers, Hermione held her hands out in an obvious sign for her Dittany back.

Erwin graciously placed it in her hands while it took a bit more time for the goggled soldier. She raised a brow at them before the leaves were placed in her palms. "You're next in line after this soldier. Can't have a wound so close to the brain getting infected," she instructed.

Not interested in their answer (and possible objection), she smiled at all of them before resuming her work on the soldier behind her.

Soldier after soldier, she worked in relative silence, ignoring any wary stares or distasteful side comments. By the time she was on her last patient, her eyes drooped in exhaustion and a yawn would interrupt her healing every couple minutes or so. But Hermione powered through and as she stepped away from her last patient she had a newfound respect for Mediwitiches. *I should send a box of chocolates to Madame Pomfrey when I get back...*

As she shuffled away to find Commander Erwin, a hand blocked her way. She looked up drowsily to find Armin looking at her with concern. Or was it pity? *Oh, I don't care, I just want to sleep .*

"You should rest a bit before we leave..." he looked like he was debating with himself, "Hermione right? Your name is Hermione?"

Pleasantly surprised, she smiled up at him, "Mhm, like in the Greek myths and the Shakespearean tales..." she stumbled as she tried to walk forward.

He caught her before she could fall and led her to an open space where she could sit. He chuckled scratching the back of his neck, "I... don't know what those are, but I'd love for you to tell me about them-"

Hermione clasped her hands in glee. She was about to go on a spiel, excited that someone wanted to *actually* listen to her rant about Shakespeare, when he proclaimed, "Oh no- not right now, you need to rest. You've been working all afternoon, nonstop." *All afternoon?*

She looked up at the position of the sun and realized it was late afternoon. She laid down on the hard wall- at that point, uncaring about where she slept as long as she did. "A-alright, I guess- maybe another time," she yawned again.

He smiled, "Yes, definitely another time."

But before he could leave she grabbed his wrist. Involuntarily, her thumb rubbed circles on his now smooth skin, "I'm really glad you're back." She gave him a wide, lazy smile as he slipped his arm from her grasp.

As she laid in a fetal-like position, she clutched her wand and beaded bag to her chest. After a few heavy blinks and interrupting yawns she closed her eyes.

Ocean eyes were the last thing she saw before drifting to sleep.

Author's Note:

With all the Levi and Hermione scenes... I was so dead set on it. I saw it in my mind- it was like a vision and I just had to do it.

German Translation from when Hermione was waking up: "-did all of this to the point of exhaustion, that's a lot for a stranger. She's either too nice for her own good or she's trying to gain something."

I have my Tumblr (where I post additional info, one-shots, and memes for this fic) and my Pinterest board for Hermione linked in my Profile bio. If those dont work- I go by the same username on most platforms so try searching for astrarqid on both.

Thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed for the last chapter! If you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox. But to the guests:

DiabolicalMinion: OMG, yeee. I'm so glad liked it so much- and my writing as well. Hope the coming chapters elicit some similar reactions! Thanks again for reviewing!

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

"It hurts. It hurts."

It- their... crying? Berthold?

He woke with a gasp, his head pounding. The image of Berthold's Titan burned into his memory. He clawed at the blanket, feeling uncomfortably warm under its weight.

What happened?

Sitting upright, he found that all he had on were his pants and his scouts' jacket. *And why am I shirtless?*

He heard a groan beside him- *Sasha!*

How did she get hurt?

"Sasha," he carefully pulled back the blanket to see the full extent of her injuries. "When-"

"-earth is old, much older than a measly 300,000 years. It's billions of years old. We are but a spec in its timeline." The accent was strange and foreign, but familiar. *Hermione?*

Why did I know that?

Slowly placing back the blanket, he looked towards the direction of the familiar voice to see the same dark-skinned witch from before. She was looking at the sky with a look of resignation mixed with hope. So even though her eyes were tired, they held a certain... joy.

What were they talking about?

She looked back at his squad members with determination and his comrades looked at her with a bit of unhidden reverence.

Interesting... She's a bit of a charmer... but did she know that?

If she did, she was crafty and a potential danger to humanity... if she didn't... Well, that bode a different kind of danger...

She made eye contact with the group as she spoke; *she was quite proficient at public speaking*. He noticed at times, she seemed uncomfortable with all of the attention, and at others, she flourished. This seemed to be one of them.

"-Remnants of those species can be found-

And though he was aware of the possible dangers, he hung to her every word like gospel, greedily committing them to memory. He would need them later; to write down at a later time or to catch her in a lie or even, to dream about in the darkness of his room...

As she continued, Armin noticed her eyes held a certain wonder as she spoke and her shoulders relaxed at her own tale. He knew that look, he knew that look *intimately* . He'd never thought he'd see it on another face that wasn't his.

She... reminds me of myself... huh...

The witch- Hermione, then gestured to Mikasa, "If you looked back far enough, you'd probably find some Homoerectus in your ancestry." She... can explain why Mikasa's different?

Was it all true though? And why would she tell us? What prompted this story?

She went on to explain why their human species was the one that prevailed.

He'd only recently started coming to terms with his own strengths and weaknesses: that his usefulness and worth could be found in a

war room more than a battlefield. Logically, he understood intelligence was essential, but hearing its importance- *his* importance confirmed gave him the strength he needed to keep fighting.

Your mind will take you to the sea, Armin, have some faith in yourself.

She began talking about migration when she abruptly stopped and summoned a small pouch through which she began rummaging. Despite barely knowing the girl, he feared for her safety as watched Levi walk towards her. He feared for his comrades as well...

He watched her jump at the sound of the Captain's voice, but she looked more annoyed than scared. Respectively, he'd ask, "What the hell was wrong with her?".

And even though the Captain's words were right- that his friends needed to know he was awake and that she had a job to do, he still yearned to hear more of her story. He'd had so little information to go off of all his life. His knowledge had always been limited to what the government had authorized, his grandfather's book on the outside world, and anything he'd learned from being in the Scouts Regiment.

He sighed internally as his friends crowded around him, he'd hear from her later. It was inevitable, of course. At the end of the day, she was still their prisoner...

He glanced at her from time to time as his friends crowded around him. Every time he looked she gave him small smiles before turning back to Captain Levi. He shot his friends confused smiles at their fussing, but once he realized that her full attention had turned to the Captain he turned to his friends.

He laughed nervously, "Guys, what is it?" They looked at him, worry in their eyes. *What exactly happened?*

"You- you don't remember?" He shook his head at Eren. "What exactly do you remember?"

"I... can remember Berthold becoming a Titan..."

"That's it?" Armin nodded, starting to get worried himself. *Did he have a concussion? Why did he forget?*

"Well, you see..." as they began filling him in- although a bit hectically- he began to understand the severity of the situation.

So I- I ate Berthold? I-

Though before they could finish, the witch- Hermione, had unceremoniously dropped a large pile of canvas on the floor. He didn't even have the time to fully process what had happened to him... All attention was shifted from telling the story to watching the witch. *I can't blame them.*

It's like she was created to call attention to herself- from her unique skin to her magical powers to her many, seemingly conflicting moods. She was like the moon, he realized... It existed for reasons unknown... it wasn't always the same, it wasn't always present, but when it was- you just couldn't help but stare.

Like the way they were all staring right now.

The spell she said was imperceptible, but suddenly the once shapeless pile of canvas became a fully upright tent.

He would watch this forever if he could. Magic was a wonder, but now *he* wondered if the sea would ever compare to the feats performed before him today.

He hoped so. He *really, truly* hoped so.

Faintly, he heard her call them into the tent. She seemed so casual- so nonchalant about using magic, about inviting them into her space, about *talking to Captain Levi*. She just seemed so confident- so *reassured*.

Watching as others began to line up behind her, he resolved in taking a look too.

As he was getting up, Mikasa put a hand on his shoulder, "Are you okay enough to move?" She looked at him with concern. He smiled to soothe their worries, "Ah, well- I heal fast now, don't I?" He met her with a smile that couldn't fully hide the pain he felt at the thought. *Oh god, I ate Berthold. I ate our comrade- our former comrade, I-*

You weren't in control, Armin and besides, you wouldn't be standing here today if you hadn't. You did this to survive- you did this to see the sea.

You can't regret this.

He looked up to see that Hermione and Captain Levi had already stepped inside. Many who'd heard her call had followed her in as well.

At first, Armin didn't think they'd all fit, but she was magic made flesh and didn't seem particularly worried either. *Must be bigger inside...*

And so a crowd proceeded to walk through the opening of a little beige tent, curiosity getting the better of them and imaginations running wild.

His eyes widened as he stepped through the flap. It was spacious of course but definitely larger than he expected. Books piled neatly in every available area- on the bookshelves, on the tables, the chairs, even the floor. It was more a library than a room, but it still had personal touches like detailed portraits that *couldn't* have been drawn and written-on papers stuck on random places on the wall.

He looked to see what the witch was doing as he took a closer look at the books. Hermione had already retreated to the bookshelf in the back where she was feverishly flipping through pages. He tried reading some of the titles but found that they were all in a different language... *Maybe if she stays long enough she can teach me...*

The length of her stay was unknown, but if staying longer meant that he could have access to all of these books, he'd gladly accept her as an ally.

He heard a book snap shut.

"Alright, you can stop the ogling. I've found the book, we can all leave, though I can always take you on a tour later..." A *tour*? He'd definitely take her up on that offer, "but you'll have to earn those privileges." *Hm?*

What would that imply? Getting into her good graces? Proving their worth? He wasn't sure, though he was aware it could partially be a joke.

He stalled, just trying to soak it all in. If this is just what she can bring with her... imagine how she lives regularly, stably with no intentions of travel... a home filled with magic day in, day out. Must be wonderful...

Must get boring...

He realized now why she was so nonchalant with her magic. She'd had it all her life- *this just didn't surprise her anymore.*

To be honest, she performed magic like it was a drag, a tool- not like what it was: a phenomenon that should be stared at in awe. And if he were being brutal, he'd say he saw more life in her when she was explaining a story than when she was performing magic.

She herded them out, becoming more and more visibly irritated. But he couldn't blame her, they were stalling... but could she blame them, *this was magic.*

Wait, did that portrait just move?

Right as he got out of the tent he felt a hand on his shoulder- *Commander Erwin!*

"Are you alright enough to use the ODM gear?" Armin nodded. So *this is when we finally get some answers...*

"Then put on a shirt and put on your gear, we're headed to the basement."

"Yes Sir!"

Once he found an unused shirt and put on his gear, he met up with Eren, Mikasa, Hange, Captain, and Commander Erwin.

"We have reason to believe that the basement of his home in Shiganshina houses a secret of the Titans that not even he is aware of. If we can just reach this basement, we may be able to obtain information that will help us break free from the Titans' century-long tyranny."

Commander Erwin's words echoed in his ear as he swung down to his hometown. *The place where it all began...*

He walked with caution despite knowing the enemy had already gone. His body jittered with anticipation, yet he still couldn't force himself to move faster. His pace mirrored that of Eren's. Because even though Armin knew the way like the back of his hand- he followed Eren since it was *his* home and *his* father's basement they were going to.

He continued to walk in relative silence, observing every little change made by Armored and Colossal Titan, and the years of neglect.

What would they find in that basement? Formulas for making people Titans? Journals filled with intensive Titan knowledge in relation to their biology? Maybe to their history?

Armin wasn't sure but he was ready to find out.

They stopped on a familiar set of stairs, "Is this it?" the Commander asked. Yes.

But he couldn't find the voice to say it. Years of guilt at not going with them, not being strong enough rushed back to him. It froze him the same way he froze on that fateful day. He shut his eyes tight. *Mikasa and Eren don't see you that way. They say they owe their lives to you- that you saved them that day you called Mr. Hannes instead of running with them.*

He shook his head, blonde strands hitting his cheeks. He'd have to start tying it up soon, either that or cut it...

They began cleaning up the area, unburying the doors to the basement that would lie underneath all the rubble. It was tedious work, slow too. Every minute or so an old memory would resurface, impeding their progress. But finally, they found the outer door- and in surprisingly well condition too.

With lanterns lighting their way, they made it down the basement. There was no flooding, no obvious damage- it just looked old. *Good, there's been no tampering.*

Commander Erwin then nodded to Eren, permitting him to unlock the door. For too long, Armin heard the clinking of metal but no actual click. *Is that the wrong key? Or no- was it the wrong lock?*

"What's wrong?" asked Hange. "Is everything alright?" asked the Commander. "Eren?" asked Mikasa.

It's not this lock. Did someone change the lock?

Armin began to sweat. *Maybe it's a lock inside, he reasoned, Mr. Jaeger wouldn't give him that key for no reason.*

"Hurry it up," Captain Levi said impatiently.

"This... this key... It doesn't go to this door.."

"What?"

"You're kidding... I'm certain that's the key Dr. Jaeger had." *Well, if Mikasa's certain...*

He tried to soothe their worries... and his own, "Maybe it's to a different lock, one that's inside the door- if we can just get inside..."

"Step aside," he pushed Eren away, "I'll open it." Through rushed objections and hasty steps back, Captain Levi kicked down the door. Heedless of splinters, the Captain pushed through the broken door.

He let Commander Erwin in first, with the rest of the group following inside. It was pitch black dark, but after lighting a lamp, they became surrounded by papers, books, and jars. *It looks normal, too normal...*

He began looking around as they talked about the Laboratory's skillful camouflage. After being reminded to begin searching by Levi, everyone found their own little nooks to start investigating in.

As Armin pulled out books, reading titles and flipping pages for clues, he checked the walls behind which the books were stored. After a while of nothing, he heard the clang of metal hit the floor.

Mikasa?

"Eren, There's a keyhole right here," she kneeled down at the side of the desk. *Ah, this has to be it.*

They walked closer to the desk. They carried the lamps they brought with them making the keyhole even more visible.

They gathered around Eren as he put the key in the lock, "It opened." *I wonder what we'll see- "It's empty?!"*

No, that can't be! There has to be-

"Look closer." *Oh.* "It's a false bottom," the Captain said as he lifted it out of the way to reveal three leather-bound books.

Armin was secretly pleased with what they had found. This was something accessible, easily digestible. They weren't unknown liquids to be analyzed but knowledge to be memorized- internalized. Something within Armin's reach and expertise... something viable.

They took them out of their protective bed and set them on the desk. "It smells like peppermint and charcoal. Were these treated to keep moisture and bugs away?" Hange inquired, holding a bundle of cloth. *If so, what was Mr. Jaeger preparing for... Did he know what was coming? Did he know they'd be left untouched for years?*

"We were looking for something... and these must be it," the Commander confirmed. *They must be.*

They waited for Eren to open the first book, "I wonder what it was my dad wanted to show me..." *We all are...*

Mikasa placed her hand on Eren's, a gesture of encouragement and proof of their bond. Eren gazed back at her in appreciation. Armin smiled.

Hopefully, they would realize each other's true feelings. Armin was tired of playing oblivious and being uninvolved. He would go insane if he had to sit through another year of their current dynamic. It was obvious they both loved each other. Maybe one day Armin would give them the push they needed... but not now. No, they needed to do it on their own.

They carefully separated the cover to see its first page. "This is... a portrait?" Eren asked, holding the slip of paper up for everyone to see.

"Let me see that," Hange grabbed the image to look closer, "No... it's far too detailed for this to be drawn by a person." *Did they just say it was too detailed?*

"Wait, can I have a closer look, there's something familiar about it..."

"Familiar...?"

"Yes, I-" he gingerly received the portrait and examined it with care. It looked very similar to the portraits in the witch's tent. Except the witch's were in color and this... was not. "The witch has similar images in her tent. She might even know more about them."

"You're right. Now that you mention it, I remember seeing a couple of them on the walls..."

"And some on her desk too. Good job on making the connection, Armin." Armin blushed at the Commander's praise. He handed the portrait to the Commander to take a closer look, but mid-transfer Mikasa noticed something.

"That's Dr. Jaeger's writing- on the back."

A date? Explanation?

Commander Erwin turned the image to read its back out loud, "This is no illustration." Armin held his breath in anticipation; he found that he couldn't breathe if he tried.

"Instead, this uses light reflected off a subject and burns the image on a special paper. It's called a photograph."

A... pho- to- graph?

"I come from a place outside the walls- We weren't the only ones... This whole time we believed we were the last survivors, but testament to Grisha Yeager's words- and even the witch's presence- that wasn't true..."

"-where humanity lives in elegance. Humanity has not perished... I pray the person who finds this book is a fellow patriot." A patriot? No need to get worked up Armin- the book will answer your questions.

Commander looked up from reading to find the gobsmacked faces of his companions- even Captain Levi looked mildly surprised.

"We have what we need, let's take the books and head back. We'll need to be at Trost by dawn."

He resisted the urge to stay and read but it was true. If they'd have stayed to read the books- especially with the lack of sunlight- they'd have found themselves engrossed all night.

They swiftly returned to the surface, closing the door behind them and covering it with more rubble to hide their tracks. They didn't need anyone knowing they had something worth risking lives for.

"Let's go."

They hurried back up the wall to find the tent had disappeared- along with the barrier.

They walked until they reached Jean and Connie with a surprisingly well-looking Sasha. Her face was no longer pale and sweaty and she was sitting upright eating some rations. She waved to them happily, and he shot Jean and Connie a confused look. Before he could ask, Captain Levi beat him to it, "Oi, what's up with Sasha?"

"Captain. Hermione- the witch asked if she could help heal the soldiers. I told her she could if she healed Sasha first," Jean answered.

"Tch, dangerous call. Have there been any side effects?"

All three shook their heads, but Connie took the opportunity to take a jab at Sasha, "None so far, Sir. She's back to being her old Potato girl-self-"

"-hey!" Sasha said with a mouth full of food.

Armin chuckled, at least one thing stayed the same.

Levi looked up at Erwin, having a silent conversation with their eyes. "Where's she now?" The commander asked.

"She's healing all the others- here, we'll take you to her."

Commander Erwin nodded.

Her eagerness to help them as well, presumably as their prisoner- was a bit baffling. She could dissolve whole boulders into pebbles and she would probably kill them all and disappear without a trace... *So why did she stay?* He could admit- while even knowing what she was capable of- that she wasn't *currently* a threat. But even so... the potential was just too large to ignore...

But now he hears that she's going out of her way to *heal* people...

Did- did we just stumble on an incredibly powerful, benevolent military ace? He was beginning to think so.

They followed Jean as he led them deeper into the makeshift sickbay of their camp.

They could easily spot her kneeling beside an unconscious man on his back, a few of the man's comrades watched her hopefully... and warily. Her hair obstructed most of her upper body in an almost gravity-defying way, but from what he could tell, she was moving over the man with much patience and care.

Captain Levi walked up to her with no warning and grabbed a clear bottle holding brown liquid from her hands.

As she turned around, her eyes flashed amber. *Uh oh.* "Yes," she crossed her arms, obviously irritated with the Captain and very not afraid to show it. "That's very expensive, you know, I'd like it back."

She bought this somewhere... there are more like her then.

The Captain just ignored her which caused the girl to huff in annoyance, "What is it?"

"It's Essence of *Dittany* -" *Oh, the medicinal plant... But how did it heal Sasha that fast- of course! She's a witch. She must have put a*

spell on the plants to make them work faster... or something like that. "-from the leaf, Dittany," she dangled her bag of Dittany mockingly at the Captain. Armin almost dropped his jaw in horror at the sight. Though all the Captain did was take the bag too.

After handing it to Commander Erwin, he almost seemed to joke with her, as if she were a long time comrade-

Did- did he trust her?

Her hair frizzled and crackled in response, almost like instead of wearing her emotions on her sleeve, she wore them in her hair... *interesting.*

She pointed her finger at Captain Levi, "Oh, I'll have you know that I have never slacked a day in my life." She crossed her arms again; her bottom lip stuck out as she looked up at the Captain... *It was kind of adorable.* "I'm quite the workaholic you know." ... *Why would she be proud of that?*

"Unlikely," the Captain said just to wind her up, though it was obvious that she *really* was a workaholic. The witch had been helping them almost nonstop and she'd *just* met them.

A strategic gain if she was their ally...

It was obvious the Captain had hit a soft spot for her so when the crackling in her hair began to die down- like the calm before a storm- others backed away, while some stepped in to protect. But the Captain just stood there smugly. *What?*

"So, think I'm poisoning your soldiers or what?" She was *pretty* bold. It was admirable, but also a little stupid. Hange spoke up to answer her but there were no questions actually answered, just directionless possibilities.

"You know there are easier ways to kill people," she murmured into her hair. *Why would she say that?! Why would she point that out?*

"I know," the Captain replied calmly. And so the same face Hermione was wearing was plastered on all his comrades' faces as well.

She seemed particularly annoyed with the Captain because when she stood, her face wore a look of absolute contempt. She straightened her back and tried to meet him eye to eye. Unfortunately, she was still shorter.

There were only a few that could rival the Captain's shortness- Historia definitely, but it was rare. Hermione was a next contender.

She brandished her wand, and he wouldn't even have been able to pull out his blades fast enough before she cast some sort of dangerous spell- *and oh, she just wanted to be taller than him...*

Oh my god, she just wanted to be taller than him!

Was he living in some sort of mummer's play right now?

She crossed her arms and relished in looking down at their Captain. Hermione smirked down at him, though it lost its original spunk when the Captain just rolled his eyes. *He must really like her.*

Thankfully, the Commander put a stop to it all and allowed her to continue her work.

She shyly stepped off the stool and gave a weak, "Yes, Sir!"

She vanished the stool and put her hands on her hips. She was staring very obviously at Hange. Wide, doe eyes trying to capture their curious, enraptured Section Commander's. Instead, her wide, brown eyes captured the attention of his own.

After being handed her items, she directed her gaze towards Hange. "You're next in line after this soldier. Can't have a wound so close to the brain getting infected," she spoke with authority, an authority that, *apparently*, Hange was willing to cooperate with.

She gave him a small smile, then proceeded to continue healing the unconscious soldier.

This had truly been the most confusing day of his life-

Did- did she just order Section Commander Hange ?

... I guess she did...

What?!

Their superiors- Hange being an exception- had already gone to deal with arranging their leave, leaving Armin alone with his friends. *They needed to finish telling him what happened.* They hurried back to the main part of camp.

"So..." he began awkwardly, "I'm a Titan now..."

Jean slapped a hand to his forehead, "That's right! We never got around to telling you everything."

So far he was only aware of how they defeated Reiner and how he was taken away by the Cart Titan... also how he and Eren defeated Berthold and how he *became* a Titan.

"Yeah, I just need to know what happened on the other side right?" They nodded. "Also, we already filled Sasha in on everything when she woke, so this'll just be new to you." Armin nodded at Connie's words.

They began telling him about how the plan he made, last minute, came into fruition. How, together, the witch- which he had to remind himself to call Hermione- and Levi defeated the Beast Titan who was now in their custody.

And how Hermione had actually helped to take care of him when he was burned. *I'm- I'm Hermione by the way-*

Was that her voice in his head? Had he remembered her voice from when he was burned?

He mentally shook himself to forget about it, *it was probably all in your head anyways*. He gestured for them to continue.

After telling him what prompted Hermione's story, they all agreed that he was basically all caught up.

Apparently, she was implying that there were more people like her, that they've just never been exposed to it before. *Could she be... from outside the walls? We can always ask later...*

Then what to do now?..

Though his body felt tired his mind was awake from everything he'd just learned. He looked at Eren and Mikasa. *Should we tell them what we've learned now?* They shrugged, understanding his look.

He figured it was the right thing to do, to let them in before everyone else was informed. They were his friends of course, and a part of the Levi Squad, it wouldn't be anything but right to do.

So he told them what they found, shushing them every few minutes or so as to not draw any attention to themselves. But by the end of the hectic exchange, Connie, Jean, and Sasha were left stunned. And rightly so; what they'd discovered changed everything.

For most of the afternoon, as they waited for Hermione to finish healing their soldiers, they sat by Sasha and watched her progress. After a while, she was even okay enough to walk on her own.

And Armin had seen her wounds- *they all had*. It shouldn't have been possible, but it was; their friend was now in perfectly fine condition.

He hadn't seen what she did, and Jean and Connie's secondhand recant hadn't been enough to quell his curiosity. He bid his friends a brief farewell before going to find the witch. He needed to see her

process- what she did to heal his comrades and maybe learn *why* in the process.

She was much deeper into the sickbay now, her posture much more slouched but she moved with no less patience and care. Her process seemed to be the use of a spell- its function unknown, and the use of either the Essence or the actual leaf depending on the severity of her patient's wounds. Essence was used for more serious injuries while the leaf was for minor ones.

He saw her shuffle to what seemed to be the last injured soldier. He looked back to where he'd come from. In his wake lay the relieved smiles from previously injured and uninjured alike. *How could she forget about herself in the process? She didn't know these people-worse, they were obviously wary of her.*

When it came to self-preservation, he observed that staying alive seemed to be her bottom line. And though she *did* seem a bit haunted before blocking that first Boulder from the Beast Titan... she seemed to be in a trance while doing so. And that "haunted" trance she was in . . . she was reacting on impulse. She had seen things- dangerous things- *cruel* things-

He shook his head.

But *here* ? In her normal state? She seemed to not care if she overexerted herself at all.

Well...

She was a self-proclaimed workaholic...

He watched as she shuffled towards the entrance of the sickbay, face covered by her mass of hair. *It's almost like a dark cloud... like a cloud at night...*

Though it was noticeably more... depleted looking? Flat almost... like it had lost some of its life.

Her hair really is a reflection of her mood...

And her clothes... what kind of material were her pants? And her boots were thick-soled and cut off right above the ankle. Her sweater seemed to be the only familiar article of clothing on her. But what did he know- much of the world was a mystery to him. This just may be normal where she comes from.

He walked to her side to make sure she was okay. Sensing that she wouldn't notice him until he was directly in front of her, he blocked her path.

"You should rest a bit before we leave..." Though he already knew her name, he debated using it so casually with her. They'd just met and she was technically *still* their prisoner. Then he remembered the voice he thought was hers, introducing herself. *Oh well*, "Hermione right? Your name is Hermione?"

Her smile was genuine if not a bit tired, "Mhm, like in the Greek myths and Shakespearean tales..." she slightly slurred. *What were those?*

But before he could ask, she stumbled during her attempt to keep walking. *She's practically dead on her feet...* He caught her before she could fall, right arm over her shoulder, the other holding her left hand to keep her steady.

He walked her to a clearing outside of the sickbay and sat her down in the middle. He felt a bit awkward, but he didn't know why. His nervous energy came out in the form of an awkward laugh and the scratching of the back of his neck. "I... don't know what those are, but I'd love for you to tell me about them-" Her doe eyes sparkled with joy. Her full lips fell into a wide smile, eyes crinkling to match- *Full lips? When had he noticed -*

Almost all traces of exhaustion left her face as she clasped her hands in delight- even her hair seemed to regain some of its vitality.

Woah...

Sensing she was about to speak he interrupted her. He didn't want to tire her out even more than she already was. She needed rest, not an eager listener expecting a full-length lecture.

"Oh no- not right now- " and even though he knew it was for the best, watching her face return from joyful to tired made him feel guilty, "- you need rest. You've been working all afternoon, nonstop." He watched her check the sky. Her mouth formed a small O in realization.

Yes, all afternoon.

She began to lay down right on the spot, a testament to how exhausted she really was. "A-alright, I guess- maybe another time," she yawned.

He smiled in amusement. *S he yawns like a cat .*

"Yes, definitely another time." He would make sure she made full of that promise.

He waited a few beats, watching her eyes grow heavier and heavier by the second. Feeling sure that she would be okay enough to be left alone, he turned to leave but then he felt a small hand grab his wrist. Her thumb rubbed small circles on his skin and he looked back at her in alarm. He'd- he'd never been touched like that before...

He was ashamed to say- but he liked the feeling. It was obvious she was out of it and didn't know what she was doing, but he craved the way she rubbed gentle circles into his skin. Armin, I think you're losing it.

"I'm really glad you're back," her smile was disarming and open, and his breath caught in his throat. *What was she doing to him?*

I guess she is just charming like that...

He nodded, finding that he didn't have anything to stay and slipped his arm from her already loosening grasp.

He watched as she curled up into a ball, holding onto her possessions for dear life. It's probably all she has at the moment- and all she'll have for a while...

After her eyes finally shut for the last time he turned to walk back to his friends.

But then he saw Captain Levi approaching him with a raised brow. *I didn't do anything wrong, did I?*

"She's done, yes?"

"Uh yes... What will we be doing with her, Sir?"

"We'll bind her hands," the Captain rolled his eyes, "Though it won't serve any practical purpose. It'll just be... a formality of sorts."

"Yes, Captain. And afterwards?"

"We don't have time to waste. We'll be leaving soon," he turned around to leave but stopped in his tracks and looked over his shoulder. "She'll be riding with you."

Armin froze, but gave a nervous chuckle, "With me Sir? Why?"

"You two seem to get along," he looked at Armin as if he knew something, "And we don't want any more trouble on the way back."

"Yes Sir. Of course."

Captain nodded to him and then took his leave. Armin let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. *Did they get along? Enough for her to be partnered with him?*

Perhaps. Perhaps in relation to everyone else.

He sighed, walking to find some rope to bind her hands.

A formality he'd said, he scoffed internally. *This was anything but formal.*

Once he had found some rope, he walked back up to her, hesitating as he grew closer and closer to her sleeping form. He didn't want to wake her- for her own sake *and* his own- but orders were orders.

He left the beaded bag hanging on her wrist and briefly wondered what to do with her "wand". Fearful of accidentally breaking the "wand" as he was riding, he experimented with the bag, wondering if the "wand" would stay put if he tightened the opening around itself.

He carefully opened the bag and slipped the "wand" inside only for it to just fall in completely. *What hap- oh right, magic.*

He tightened the end of the bag and then continued to bind her wrists. He was surprised by how still she stayed as he worked. She was deep in slumber and by the looks of it- probably wouldn't wake until they were on horseback.

He carried her bridal style to where his friends were waiting to depart. *What an odd feeling material her pants were...*

He set her down on her feet to lean on him as they stood. Her hair, a sort of pillow against the hard muscle of his upper arm.

Connie laughed at the scene in front of him, "Woah- what's up with you and the witch?"

"Nothing's "up" with us. Captain just ordered that she ride with me on the way back."

"Oh, tough luck there, bud, it'll be hard riding with an unconscious person on board." *I guess...*

"Yeah, but it'll be fine though. I can make it."

"Of course you can. We believe in you," Eren clasped his hand on his open shoulder. Armin gave him a shy smile in return. "Thanks, Eren."

"Let's go already! I'm just *salivating* at the thought of that "Welcome home, Success Feast" we're gonna get as soon as we get back." Sasha's eyes glazed over at the thought of meat being served to her soon. They all chuckled at her antics.

"Alright, alright, let's go."

Hip to hip with Hermione, he swung down to the ground where their horses awaited. As soon as he found his horse he froze.

Alright then- how are we getting on...?

Author's Note:

Bit of an info dump... a lot that we're learning here BUT IT MUST BE DONE... ok lemme not-

Anyways, I have my Tumblr (where I post additional info, one-shots, and memes for this fic) and my Pinterest board for Hermione linked in my profile bio. If those don't work- I go by the same username on most platforms so try searching for astrqid on both.

I don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

Thanks to all that followed and/or favorited for the last chapter!

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

"I didn't take anything. I didn't take it- I didn't take anything."

She woke up in a cold sweat to find that the sky was dark. *How long did I sleep?* she mouthed to herself. She almost bit her tongue at the act.

She felt the bitter remnants of her dream- more like her nightmare- in the scars on her forearm and neck. *Every time.* Every time she dreamed of that moment her scars would reopen as if they were as fresh as the day she received them... *maybe that was the curse of the blade*, she once mused to herself alone at night.

To be slowly bled to death for years by way of psychological terror...

She mentally slapped herself to get it together. Apparently, she was still their prisoner by the way they bound her wrists again- *they do know she could just get out of these at any time, right?*

And by the way she was moving- *and by the way my bum felt like a bitch-* she recognized that she was on horseback.

As she became more cognitive, she also realized that she was riding in front of someone. She could feel their chin brush against the back of her head and their chest rub against her back. *And was that an arm wrapped around my waist?* She looked down. *It was.*

Oh, Merlin, was it Levi again- no it couldn't be. This person was too tall to be Levi if their chin was jutting into the back of her head like it was.

Then who was it?

She heard Armin's voice speak to her but couldn't understand the words.

So I'm stuck with Armin? Just my luck.

She tried fighting the smile that forced its way on her face. She really did want to be annoyed with her situation, but she really couldn't help but smile to herself. *I'm stuck with the Ocean eyes guy...* Well, she wasn't particularly against this turn of events.

She turned back so that he could partially see her face. Then pulled her hair back and pointed to her ear as she shook her head; she did as best as she could on horseback and hoped that he would understand.

She felt him nod against her hair and turned back around to find her wand. After a few moments of stressful searching, the arm wrapped around her waist lifted to point at her beaded bag. She brought the bag closer to his hand and looked back to see the answer in his eyes. He nodded again.

Alright, it's in my bag... just a quick Accio in the bag then.

Wand in hand, she cast the translation spell. "I can understand you now."

"Oh good," he chuckled warmly, "I was getting kind of tired of nodding."

She smiled, "And I'm getting kind of tired of performing this spell... teach me?"

"Hm?"

"Teach me your language- oh, I mean- please teach me your language."

His grip around her waist tightened, "Alright, I'll teach you our language... if you teach me yours."

"It's a deal then," she leaned her head back against his chest, looking at the unrecognizable star patterns. *Different world then... why am I not surprised...*

"Mm, yes, just- just don't tell anyone else yet," he whispered into her ear, "You're, technically, still in our custody, but I have a feeling you'll be out of it sooner or later."

"Well, that's good then. I don't *particularly* like being tied up like this," she shook her tied wrists in irritation, then sighed in defeat. *They won't like it if I escape again, and this time I won't have the distraction of battle to shield me from the consequences...*

"I wasn't too fond of you being restrained either, but those were my orders, and well- we don't trust very easily."

"That's understandable." Considering what she'd seen them have to fight... *It was brutal out there.* She stared straight ahead of her, "Then I hope we can cooperate smoothly going forward."

"Yes, I hope so too," he answered diplomatically.

Hermione could hear him cough to clear his throat, "I- I would also just like to take this moment to thank you-"

Thank me? For what?

"-for helping bring me back. My comrades told me you played an important role in my "Ressurection", " he sighed.

"I wouldn't say I was *that* important, but I played a role, yes. And you're welcome of course- I'm- I'm glad I did it." *Even if she had to watch cannibalism in the process.* She felt both content and disgusted with herself for feeling that way.

He cleared his throat once more, "I'm glad you think so... I'm sure seeing the... transformation process was quite gruesome for you- and for that, I am also sorry."

She shook her head, "You were non-cognizant, unaware of what was going on- you didn't even make that call- we did actually. So you have nothing to be sorry for, okay?"

"Mm."

They rode most of the way in relative silence, short bursts of mini interrogations peppered in here and there.

He asked her another question as they rode through a sleeping town, "Were you born a witch, Hermione?"

"Ah yes, but my powers didn't manifest till I was 4 and tried to get a book down from a shelf. My parents told me the whole room looked a mess right after," she chuckled.

"Always had a love for books then?" She was surprised at the observation but then remembered he had been one of the soldiers to enter her tent. "Yes, always," she smiled fondly.

"We have that in common then," he mentioned, a bit *too* casually to not mean anything more, but she chose to overlook it.

"Oh? Well, I'm glad that we can find some common ground. I would hate to be stuck here with no friends."

She felt him freeze against her back.

"Stuck here? In the walls?" His mood seemed to change drastically.

"Huh?" *Walls? There are more than just the two we've seen?* "No- stuck here, in *this* world." His horse stalled before running at full speed again.

Nearby soldiers shot them dirty looks.

"You mean to tell me there are different worlds? Like- you mean to say *entirely different universes* ?" He strained his neck to face her as she strained hers to face him. He was hard to read in that moment;

his eyes swimming with a variety of emotions. He probably didn't know what he was feeling either.

"I didn't think it possible- well, till today," she looked up at the now ombré sky, its hues ranging from navy blue to coral pink.

"Well, how do you know for sure? Couldn't you just be from a different place- in the same world?"

She shook her head.

It was dawn, so their unfamiliar stars had already gone, "So... those stars that were in your sky..." He nodded for her to continue.

"I didn't recognize a single pattern they made. Not *one* constellation. And I know *every single one* from back home," she sighed for what felt like the umpteenth time that day. "That's how I knew for sure. Though, I did suspect something deeper than time travel when I first arrived here."

"So even time travel was also on the table? Is our society *that* archaic compared to yours?"

"Quite. However, not in the same way my world's past is- you're... very unique technologically speaking. It was the first red flag."

"Will you tell me about your world? Not just how your world differs technologically, or how our class structures may be different- but stories, like the one you were telling yesterday... or the ones you mentioned to me before going to sleep-"*I mentioned some stories to him?* Thankfully he didn't notice her confusion and kept talking.

"-Something about myths and Shaking spears?" *Oh!*

"Oh yes, the origin of my name," she smiled at his enthusiasm. "My parents were referencing a name from a play by a man named Shakespeare, but he got the name from a story from the ancient civilization of Greece... Do you have a Greece in your world?"

He coughed to clear his throat, "Well- we don't actually know yet. We've been isolated from the rest of humanity, and we didn't even know *that* till recently."

"Oh? Is it that you've met the first foreigners here?"

He squirmed uncomfortably, "Something like that."

"Must be confusing yet exciting to have your world expand like that..." Hermione reminisced on joining the Wizarding world.

"I've lived through something quite similar, you know. I could help you with it if you'd like?" She turned her head once more, looking him in his ocean eyes.

He smiled down at her, "Yes... I think I'd like that."

She nodded, mesmerized with how his eyes looked against the dawn's pinkish hues. She swiftly turned around, praising Merlin that her dark skin hid the blush she felt climbing up her cheeks.

She looked around, desperately needing something else to focus her attention on. She then realized that she was so engaged in their conversation, that she didn't notice that they'd entered into a more urbanized city.

What an odd mix of eras...

"What year is it here?"

"... It's 850." *Well if that isn't proof enough...*

"The 850 of my world is *very* different to this- also, in my time it's 1999."

"Truly?"

"Mm, I have a couple books about it. For now, you can look at the pictures and listen to me read to you, but once you learn "English"-

my native tongue, you'll be able to read them on your own." She wished there was a written version of the translation spell, but alas Magic had its limits... *odd that that was one of them.*

He smiled eagerly, the grip on her waist tightening by just the smallest fraction. She let out a breathy laugh, *I haven't been touched like this in years... and the fact that it took traveling to a whole 'nother world to feel it.*

Merlin, what was going on?

She looked around to avoid the answer.

It was getting later in the morning now. The more houses they passed the more people were out and about.

Still, there were only a few civilians around- *thankfully*- but they all stared at her as they rode past. *Get used to it, Hermione; there'll be a lot more of that in the near future.*

She stared at their destination, it was a grand castle- not as grand as Hogwarts, but certainly grand for its time. *Are they taking me to their government leaders? Their king? Queen? Do they even have a monarchy? What if they have a council...*

They stopped at the castle's stables where their horses were to be collected and organized. Armin got off first, holding a hand out for her to latch on to as she slid off. *How'd he get me up here in the first place?*

She stumbled as she landed on the dirt floor. Armin had been ready to catch her but she shook her head to show that it wasn't needed.

They began walking towards the castle, Armin slightly behind her to "keep watch". She flexed her ankles. Her bottom still hurt and her whole body felt sore. She wanted to flex her wrists but feared she would receive a rope burn. She conceded to stretching everything else as much as she could... to pretty much no avail.

She hissed as she stretched her neck. She stopped in her tracks. *Shit, I forgot-* She looked down to see the beginnings of a line of blood seep through the top of her jumper. She hastily put her wand to her throat. *Quick, I've got to-*

"You're bleeding? Are you alright?" His hand reached out to the cut on her neck but she flinched in response. She covered her neck in shame, "Sorry. Uh yeah, it'll be fine. I'll take care of it later."

He took a small step forward, "No, it looks bad- Hermione, is your arm bleeding too?" She cursed to herself. How could she be so *careless- well- I have been pretty occupied and I sure as hell wasn't expecting to sleep in front of strangers*. She sighed internally. *Now, how to avoid this conversation...*

"-did one of the scouts hurt you? Why didn't you tell anyone? Or heal your wound-"

She brought both of her palms- as they were bound- to his chest to stop him, pleading with her eyes for him to just *be quiet*, "-it wasn't anyone you know..." she looked away from his presumably pitying gaze, "It happened a long time ago. I'm okay."

He seemed confused at her wording, "H- Okay. If you say so, but- he stopped himself from continuing and looked to the side with a slight blush on his cheeks. "Please heal yourself, I... don't like seeing people in pain."

She nodded, then turned to hide the sight of the inflamed slur on her arm. She soothed and sealed her scars to the best of her ability, but unbeknownst to him- they would never heal. She vanished the blood from her sweater and when she felt like every last drop had gone, they continued walking, the atmosphere a bit more tense than before.

When they entered, they separated from the main body of soldiers heading for a different wing of the castle.

He opened a door deep into the opposite wing and gave her an apologetic look. Taking the lantern hung on the wall of its entrance, he led her down a set of stairs to some sort of dungeon.

As he led her in front of a cell, she let out a nervous laugh. She tried joking to mask it, "Eheh, will this be my new home then?" She weakly elbowed his side.

He looked quite sad, it was starting to make *her* sad too, "No... not as long as you're our ally. But..." He turned to begin unraveling the rope around her wrists, "I believe you are... This will just be where we hold you until they decide."

Loose rope in one hand, he opened one of the cell doors, beckoning her inside. She nodded in return, letting go of the lighthearted facade, "Will you visit?" She stepped into the cell, tensing as she heard it lock behind her. She turned around and waited for his answer.

He looked at the ground next to him, "If I can," he straightened his posture and looked her in the eye, "I'll stay until the Commander comes, but- I don't know if he'll let me stay after that."

Under the low, warm light of the lamp, his eyes became a Sea green instead of an Ocean blue- she found that she preferred the original.

She spoke softly, more to herself than to him, "Yes, yes of course... I wouldn't want to take you from your duties."

He was about to speak when they heard the patter of footsteps climbing down the stairs. *Was it the Commander?*

She watched as Levi and the Goggled soldier stepped around the corner. "Arlert, you can stay. But don't get in our way."

"Yes Sir!"

The goggled soldier- despite their eyes holding a bubbling curiosity- held a professional gaze and seemed to be the one conducting the investigation.

"I am Section Commander Hange Zoe, this is Captain Levi Ackerman. We're both of the Scouts Regiment within the walls." Hange looked at her as if expecting a reaction- but got none.

"Hello Hange Zoe, Levi Ackerman," she nodded her head to them, "My name is Hermione Granger and I'm a witch from another world." *Way to outdo them, Hermione.*

"A-another world?"

This went on for quite some time. For hours they went back and forth with theories and reasonings for the Multiverse. This led to a discussion on clarifying some things about each other's worlds- technology, class structures, culture. What they chose to give her was limited, and the information they *did decide* to give her seemed disconnected. She couldn't be *100%* sure, but they seemed to be omitting the most information on "Titans" and their government- probably keeping them from her due to her prisoner status. She sighed to herself.

This'll be such a tedious process.

Towards the beginning of the discussion, Armin chimed in a couple times to clarify small things about their world that she might've missed. But as the hours dragged on, Hange, Armin, and Hermione were equally engaged in their conversation.

They didn't stop their talk to eat, their meals were served to them by a Scout named Floch and eaten right there in the dungeon. Rather than stop to eat, they just ate while they talked to continue the flow.

Soon enough, this "interrogation" became a full-fledged intellectual discussion- with Levi listening attentively, mentally taking note of key points of their discourse.

At one point, Hermione even began pulling books out of her beaded bag to show them pictures of their earth to try and compare them with their own but found that they only knew their walls and the surrounding area.

Maybe they didn't have much to omit in the first place. ..

They all stepped closer to her cell to take a look at her magically enlarged map. After much explaining on "globe to map" translations and helping them decipher the key of the map and its nomenclature, Armin slipped his arm through the cell bars and touched the paper in awe.

"So you're saying that the ocean is a real, *definite* thing in your world?" There was no hiding the happiness and hope on his face.

"Of course," she couldn't help but smile back, "See, most of our world is covered by ocean-" she ghosted her wand over all the blue on the map, "I don't see why it would be any different for yours."

His shoulders loosened in tension. "That- that's great."

Levi stared at the map in satisfaction, "You know, you never finished your story from earlier."

"The one I was telling on the wall?" They all nodded. *I genuinely forgot.*

"Oh. Well, let's see- where to start?" Hermione pondered into an empty space on the wall.

"The last thing you mentioned was a migration of sorts?" Armin offered.

"Yes! Thank you. Now, I'm not sure if this would apply to your world too. So let me frame it in a way that stresses that this is from *my* world- maybe not yours. But it may very well be the same..."

She levitated the map in the air and pointed to Mid East Africa with her wand, "This is where homosapiens began migrating to the rest of the world," she pointed to the Bering Strait, "This used to be land too- before the sea levels rose. Humans were still able to cross over from Asia into North America to populate the continent."

"Anyways, as people migrated out of Africa into much different environments- their bodies adapted to fit and survive in those environments. The original homosapiens from Africa- well, they looked like me."

"How would our skin benefit our environment, how would yours?"

"So, dark skin is good in warmer climates because it contains higher levels of *melanin* . This is the pigment that gives the skin its color and helps protect the skin from some forms of sun damage. Darker skin also served as a better barrier to the body from dehydration and infections..." She began motioning to Europe and other Northern regions.

"Now as humans migrated North and farther from the hotter climate and longer days, they exchanged their darker pigments for a better way to store energy from the food they ate. Some also suggest that fairer skin causes the body to create more Vitamin D- a... chemical of the body that helps with bone health. Honestly, the body will *not* just waste precious energy to create traits that it will no longer need."

"Ah, I see..." Hange's eyes gleamed with curiosity, "But then why does Mikasa look different? She still has lighter skin, doesn't she?"

"Well her eyes were evolved to better block out the sun from her gaze. Many people of my ancestry share these traits as well, as they had them in the first place. But as of now, it is most common in East and Southeast Asians who come from here," she circled her finger around the mentioned regions.

"It's a very complicated thing and not as cut and dry as some would like to think. None of these traits mentioned are exclusive to one

group of people but they do tend to be more common in some more than others. There are even a wider variety of traits than the ones you've seen in me or Mikasa. An infinite amount."

"Do these differences serve as an issue in your world? Is there any tension caused by these differences?" Hange raised a knowing brow.

She sighed despondently, "... Yes. Some even use this difference in "race" to excuse their hatred and bigotry. But we're all just human- that's what I say," Hermione shrugged.

"It seems..." Hange sighed in a bout of maturity, "That no one can escape that hell- no matter where they go."

"No, it seems not," she frowned. Just like her transition from the muggle world to the magical...

She rubbed the scar on her arm in discomfort. *Fuck, it stings...*

Armin caught the act and sent her a worried look to which she dismissed with a shake of her head and a small smile.

She then guided them onto a much less depressing topic that ended up just as depressing as the last. She decided to openly discuss her theories on how she got to their world and why, making sure to let their ideas bounce off each other to come to a better, cohesive conclusion.

"Yes- well, it *is* highly possible that the moon may have something to do with it..." she twirled her wand between her fingers as she thought, "In my world, we had a Full moon. When I arrived, you had a New moon... There's something about that moon..."

"Yes! I was actually talking about the moon when you arrived. I was all like, 'It's a good thing the moon's not out tonight, we might come across that new breed of Titan that moves with moonlight'," their grin was wide, reminiscent of what had happened just a day ago.

Soft scratches could be heard as Armin took a written note of the entire conversation. He volunteered a while ago when he realized they were coming up with very important ideas that could aid them in the future.

"Mm, does the moon have any significant meaning to you?"

She stared at him, a bit wide-eyed. She had been holding off on telling them about werewolves and her work on the Wolfsbane potion. She wasn't entirely sure why yet, but she did know this was something dear to her heart- something she felt was so integral to her as a person... She felt as though she would be laid out for them to pick at if she were to let them know.

She hesitated, "Yes, but-" she looked away from his curious gaze, "In my world, we have people who can involuntarily turn into wolf-like creatures on the full moon. They lose all humanity and become animalistic creatures that prey on humans... though, they do tend to leave animals alone unless they feel the urge to hunt for meat..."

"They suffer with something called Lycanthropy, and it's spread through the bite of a "Werewolf" on a full moon," she sighed, "A close friend of mine had the disease... In his honor, I was trying to improve a potion that would let their human minds control their "Werewolf" bodies. But as of yet, there's no "cure"."

They nodded solemnly, recognizing that she referred to them in the past tense. They allowed for a moment of silence, understanding the loss of a close friend.

Levi waited another moment before asking, "And you were in a forest at night, why exactly?"

"The potion I was making required that I gather the ingredients on a Full Moon."

Levi nodded, satisfied with the answer. He nodded to Hange before they both stood up to leave the cells. With a surprising amount of

seriousness, Hange addressed her.

"Well- it's getting late. Sorry, but you'll be sleeping here tonight. We'll be back with Commander Erwin tomorrow... You'll get his final verdict by then."

Hermione nodded to Hange in understanding, then turned to see Armin follow shortly after.

He stilled before reaching the stairs.

He turned his head so that she could only see part of his face.

She couldn't tell if it was a trick of the light, but his cheeks seemed to flush a deep red, "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow," she echoed in a promise while leaning against the bars of her cell.

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye," he echoed in return, disappearing up the stairs.

Author's Note:

So there's been more development in Armin and Hermione's relationship! Exciting!

I have my Tumblr (where I will and do post additional info, one-shots, and memes for this fic) and my Pinterest board for Hermione linked in my bio)

I also don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

She was awoken by the sound of keys jingling in a lock. "Wha-"

She heard Levi's monotone voice but couldn't understand his words. She held up a palm, signaling for him to wait as she released the silencing charm put in place to hide her nightmare-induced screams. They weren't too common, but one could never be too cautious- *especially after yesterday morning's debacle*. She then cast the translation spell.

I'm getting real tired of this stupid translation spell- hope Armin's a good teacher 'cause I need to learn this language A.S.A.P . She motioned for him to continue.

"Get up, lazy ass. The Commander's here."

"Rude," she rubbed the sleep out of her eyes. She stiffly stood up to greet the Commander, clothes still in array, but she tried for a smile, "Hello Commander Erwin."

She spotted Hange and Armin behind. She gave them a small, tired wave. Armin waved back shyly while Hange waved back with both hands and a wide smile.

She did a double-take at Armin. He had his hair tied in a messy ponytail. Long blond hair framed his face while his bangs still fell loosely over his eyes. *He looked... good.*

To hide her silent appraisal, she turned her nose up in mock snobbery, "Hello to you too, Levi."

"Yes, hello. Let's hurry this up shall we?"

She sighed, "Yes, of course."

The Commander sat on a chair in front of her cell. He pulled out the notes from yesterday and-

*He's one-armed... How did she not notice he only had one arm?
How did he use the 3D maneuvering gear?*

Yesterday, one of the first things she asked was how the gear worked. Hange had perked up at the question- though, how someone could perk up from an already perky state was a mystery to her. From what they'd explained it seemed quite difficult to use... *So just how good was he then?*

She eyed Armin as he sat down next to the Commander, essentially being his scribe for the day.

"Miss Granger- you claim to be a witch from another world. There's obviously evidence to the former- but how can you truly prove you're from another world?"

"As of now- I can't," she shrugged. "All I have is my word and a promise to show you any information that may help you believe me as you begin to learn about the outside world."

He nodded.

"In addition to the examination held yesterday by Section Commander Hange and Captain Levi, Private Arlert has let us know everything you've told him so far. We'd also like for you to clarify some things, and of course, answer any additional questions."

She looked over to where Armin was sporting a bright red blush. He mouthed a "sorry" then sought to avoid her gaze. She smiled.

She didn't blame him for "snitching", she was highly aware of the possibility- welcomed it even.

Armin and her got along relatively well. And *hopefully*, his sentiments would influence their decision- and besides, she knew he was

genuine in his kindness and interest.

"I agree to those terms."

"Good, let us begin-"

For hours they went back and forth. Somewhere in the middle of their talk, Erwin pulled out a black and white photograph of a family. "What can you tell us about this?"

She stared at them incredulously, "About... the photograph?"

"Aha! There's that name again! Photograph. So it really just burns the light reflected from a scene into a special kind of paper?"

Hermione nodded at the Section Commander, "Yes, muggle ones. Magical ones work a bit differently. We don't use special paper for ours... also... ours move."

They'd already gone over the basic structure of her world, especially the magical vs muggle dynamic. So they already understand what she meant when she referred to muggles.

Armin hummed in understanding and his eyes held a satisfied gleam.

"How do you get them to move?"

"An enchantment to any material- doesn't need to be paper per se."

"I see," Commander Erwin looked up from the notes, "The ones in your tent are obviously magical- but the color, is that magic too?"

"No Sir, muggles in my world also have color photos. See, we've had them so long that most have shortened the word and just refer to them as photos."

She leaned forward to take a closer look at the picture, "Judging by the aging on this photo, I'd say they may be already referring to it as

such outside the walls."

He raised his brow at Hermione- *that... might've been a very suspicious thing to say...*

She cursed.

Unfortunately, Hermione couldn't help herself; she liked making logic-based inferences, conclusions, and everything else under the sun. But internally, she was beating herself up at the slip.

She chose to act oblivious to the mishap, continuing on, "But all the colors we can see are just what light is not being absorbed into the object, but reflecting it instead."

"The colors that we can see?"

"Yes. Different organisms see colors and the world differently than we do. Even some humans do not have full-color vision and are limited to seeing the whole world in black and white or in limited/skewed ways."

She went on to clarify anything that they might not understand. These were entirely new concepts to these people, she had to be thorough.

"There are different spectrums of light that pertain to different spectrums of color and..."

There was much more questioning that day. They slid in many "trick" questions about someplace called "Marley"- that she was sure she would've remembered if there was one in her world and a race of people called Eldians- which just sounded straight-up fantastical.

It was another long day- though, much more tiring than the last. At one point, she even yawned halfway into the middle of her answer. But she powered through, knowing that cooperation was her best chance of getting back home.

Truly...? She could've escaped the moment they took her prisoner- but that would've cut off her access to any useful information. Because militaries *always* had some secret stash of knowledge that not even their own governments knew. Working with them was just her best chance.

One of the last things they'd discussed before she received their verdict was about the extent of her magic- mainly battle-oriented, which she could only lightly touch upon. *They must want to use me as a weapon or form a military alliance of sorts...*

"It's true, is it not, that you could've left these cells anytime you wanted? Why do you stay our prisoner? What's in it for you?"

"Information," she said simply, "I need to know more about this world to get back home to mine, and running away from it seems like the foolish thing to do."

"You could easily enter any government building, any military base-"

"-Oi, Erwin-" Levi interrupted, taken aback by his Commander's candor.

"-why would working with us benefit you?"

"I find that results come faster when you work as a team," she stared at the wall behind their heads, eyes glassy with the memories of her friends back home.

"Information may be limited to whatever we decide to tell you, as from what I understand you will not be able to read any of our texts yet... until you learn our tongue."

"Yes, I understand- though, I am working on a solution to that problem."

"You are?"

"Yes Sir, I just haven't gotten around the logistics yet."

Very suspicious Hermione... but the truth is the truth.

The Commander then rose from his seat, the others following in his steed.

Commander Erwin cleared his throat, "I'm sorry to say—" her heart stuttered in her chest. *Fuck, I fucked up. What should I say to-* "but you'll be staying here for a few more days. Just until we find a suitable room for you within the castle." Hermione let out a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. She gave him a slight smile in relief.

"You will not go anywhere without a member of the Scouts accompanying you, though I'm sure that won't be a problem," and even though Commander Erwin had not hinted to anyone in particular, Hermione felt her cheeks warm. She looked up through her lashes to find Armin in a very flustered state.

Cheeks still warm, Hermione nodded, happy with those terms. "May I request one thing Commander?"

"If within reason."

"May I request that Armin teach me your language?"

She heard a sharp scoff come from the Captain but she chose to ignore it. Hange was attempting to act low-key, nudging Armin in the side with a not-so-hidden smirk.

"I will permit it- as long as Armin also agrees to this request."

Armin straightened his posture at the attention of the Commander, "I'll agree- as long as she teaches me her language in return," he said, fulfilling the promise they made to each other the day before. He sent her a knowing smile which she returned in kind.

"Then it's settled. We'll leave you for the night. Someone will come down to bring you dinner shortly after. Until tomorrow," he nodded to

her and they all took their leave.

Hermione was once again left alone inside the cell and she sighed at the quietness of her prison.

Hermione thanked Merlin that she was never put in one during the war- that would've made for a much different experience to the one she was going through in that moment. Instead of fear, she felt only boredom and began looking through her beaded bag for something to occupy her mind.

She took out her Discman- she'd brought it instead of the standard phonograph that wizards usually use- feeling it would be a better choice for a portable residence.

She was always a bit behind on the music trends of the late 90's- well, except for a few albums and tracks- but she listened to her daddy's music. And her dad said you could never go wrong with Michael.

She smiled, memories of slow dancing with her dad and "shakin" it with her mum fluttered through her mind. She was so lost in her own thoughts that she hadn't noticed Armin looking down at her- and her Discman- curiously in front of her cell.

"Oh- hello," she smiled tiredly.

"Hello Hermione," he smiled back. He then frowned at the device in her lap and the tears she hadn't noticed in her eyes. "Are you alright?... You look like you've been crying."

She scrambled to wipe the tears from her face, "Do I? Oh dear, sorry about that."

"No need to be sorry- it's just- I've brought you dinner as promised..."

She was waiting for him to continue while he seemed to be debating with himself. "Is it because of that thing- the thing in your lap?"

She looked back down at the Discman, "Yeah, it kind of is... do you wanna see what it does?"

She began to feel giddy at the thought of showing him her music. Slowly but surely her sad mood was being left behind.

His face brightened just a tad at the suggestion, "Oh yeah, of course- is this magic too?" He slid her food through the slot and she thanked him.

She shook her head and placed the tray beside her, "No, this is more muggle technology. It plays music!" She beckoned him closer as she scooted to be adjacent to the wall behind her and bars to her side. He sat down next to her, almost shoulder to shoulder if there weren't any bars in the way.

"Does it really- and with no magic?" He stared eagerly at the Discman.

"Mhm," she nodded, eyes sparkling at the question. She pulled out her CD book and picked a song from an album that her father loved to listen to on lazy afternoons.

"Okay, so see this disc," Armin nodded. She opened the Discman to place the CD inside. "This CD player- or Discman uses flashing laser lights- you know, like *pew pew pew*," she shot imaginary lasers with her fingers. Remembering his ignorance to the Sci-Fi reference, she flushed and kept her eyes on the Discman.

She tucked some hair behind her ear, "Well it uses "lasers" to record and read back the information from this shiny metal disc- this "CD"."

"So this "CD" holds the music?" He smiled at her flustered state, happy that he wasn't alone in the feeling.

"Yes, exactly! Here, let me show you," she skipped all the songs till it stopped on the track she wanted, then pressed the play button.

They heard the drums first, then the synthesizers which must've been such a new sound for him. She looked to see his eyes widen with confusion, but she dared not pause the music- she would rather let him just sit through the experience.

She started hearing the bass. An instrument which never failed to make her groove- even on the floor of a dungeon cell.

"The song's name is Rock with You by a man named Michael Jackson." It felt weird hearing her own voice say Michael Jackson in a slightly German accent but it couldn't be helped. *This was a weird set of circumstances after all.*

She bobbed her head to the rhythm and once she heard the violins, she readied herself for Michael's beautiful voice.

A wave of nostalgia waved over her as he sang. Blueberry muffins and warm cups of tea as they read in the sitting room or watched dramas on the telly or listened and danced to music in the afternoons. She sighed. *I miss them... I miss all of them.*

She mouthed the words to the song, eyes closed not only in the attempt to rid herself of her longing but also in the mild ecstasy of listening to such a sensual song.

"Out on the floor

There ain't nobody there but us

Girl, when you dance

There's a magic that must be love," she sang softly.

She opened her eyes to see Armin's foot tapping against the cobblestones and his Ocean eyes fixed on her singing lips. She

grinned and stood up, grooving even bigger to coax him into dancing too.

He was a bit awkward at first, but as the music played it became less awkward and more... uncoordinated. *For someone so graceful in the air, he sure is stiff on his feet. Just like Harry*, she mused.

He began mimicking her moves. He let out a breathless laugh as he pointed his fingers diagonally in that signature disco move.

She laughed in return, having the most fun she's had in weeks. They spent the better part of the night letting songs go by, just doing whatever felt right to the music. After a while, her body caught up with her and she collapsed with a tired laugh.

He followed her, sitting on the other side of the bars. He was noticeably less tired than she was- probably due to that soldier stamina that she just *did not* have.

She leaned her head against the bars, "So, what do you think of my world's music?"

He grinned, "I think it's different and new and *wonderful* . There were so many sounds I've never even *heard* and the way he sang- I've never heard *anyone* sing like that!"

She avidly listened to his wonder, "What's your music usually-"

A knock came from the door at the top of the stairs. She quickly turned off her music and stilled, letting out a not-so-quiet snicker. He seemed to be holding his breath as well, but his face was no less amused.

They both waited for something to happen and after a few moments of tense anticipation, she heard him giggle. It was such a pretty thing. He held his stomach at the action, body shaking with quiet laughter. She began laughing as well, feeling dazed and refreshed from the experience.

After their laughter died down, he sighed, "I guess I've got to get going." He gave her an apologetic look, but she could only shake her head to signify that he'd done nothing wrong.

He slowly stood to leave, dusting and dirt off his uniform- *he looks quite good in that green coat...*

"I'll see you tomorrow?"

She nodded, "Of course, I'm not going anywhere," she joked.

He nodded back with a boyish grin, "Goodnight then."

She waved from her spot on the floor, "Goodnight," and she watched him disappear up the stairs once again.

She sighed to herself once he was gone.

Merlin, what am I doing?

Am I really getting attached to someone I might not ever see again?

She shook her head to rid herself of such cynical thoughts- *making positive connections with people was not a crime.*

And she's been attached to *many* -a-people who she will, now, *never* see again.

She pressed play on her Discman once again, pulling out a book from her beaded bag to distract her from her more morbid thoughts. Hopefully, with the help of the book and the music and the good mood, she wouldn't have any nightmares.

She certainly didn't yesterday.

She yawned, this was going much more smoothly than she thought it would. They seemed like relatively "good people"- well, they were good to her- and she believed that with their help, she'd get home.

She had to.

Author's Note:

Hermione and Armin are just adorable ! 333

I have my Tumblr (where I will and do post additional info, one-shots, and memes for this fic) and my Pinterest board for Hermione linked in my bio:)

I also don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

Thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! If you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 7

Chapter 7

"Pssst, Hermione. Hermione, aufwachen."

Huh, huh? Wha-?

She sat up on the bed, the book on her chest falling messily onto her lap. She hastily fluffed up her hair to look at least somewhat presentable. She then promptly released the silencing charm she'd cast the night before, then cast a translation spell to greet him.

She looked at him with a bit more clarity now that the sleep was starting to leave her eyes. *This must be the usual way he wears his hair.*

His hair was tied up again- even though the first time she'd seen him his hair was down. Though now, she couldn't help but admire the way his hair was currently styled. *He looked... quite handsome with it messily up like that.*

"Oh- good morning, Armin-" she noticed he brought two others with him. *Weren't their names Eren and Mikasa...? And why is Eren eyeing me like that? Like I'm a problem to solve? Doesn't he already know why my skin is dark?... Surely, Armin would've told him the finished story...*

She ignored those observations and waved, "-and Armin's friends. What brings you here today?" She fixed the book on her lap and placed it to her side.

"I wanted to show them the music player you showed me yesterday," he rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly, "They kind of didn't believe me when I told them."

Before that, the same dark-haired boy from the battle- Eren, had been a little despondent if not a bit grumpy. After hearing Armin's apparent "slander" he perked up to defend himself.

"Okay, I said 'No way!' not 'I don't believe you'!"

"Kind of the same thing, Eren."

"Is it really though-"

"Guys," Misaka chided.

Hermione sighed internally- they reminded her so much of another *certain* trio.

Armin sent Mikasa a sheepish look, then directed it towards Hermione, "Yeah, so I was wondering if we could listen to some of your music."

She *acciod* her CD book, "Of course," she began flipping through its pages, "Let me just find something good... or would you rather us listen to what we did yesterday?"

"Anything is fine, we don't get to listen to much music anyways. So we're not very partial to anything."

She kept flipping through the book, now having a general idea on what she wanted to play, "Alright," she smiled, "If you do listen to music. What would it sound like?"

She finally picked an album- Baduizm by Erykah Badu- and decided she would let the album start with the Intro.

Although- maybe she'd play "Afro" or "Certainly" next.

"We use a lot of flutes and string instruments and hmm..." he let out a hum in thought, "Most of our lyrics are based on stories or poems. I'm not that sure beyond that. We don't usually have the time to listen to music unless a scout brings a flute or something of the like."

She nodded in understanding. *Sounds like the components of Medieval music... This must sound incredibly new to them then,* "In my world, we have different types of music that we organize into "genres". This is more Neo-Soul or "New" Soul, but it's actually a combination of genres." She pressed play and heard a lone bass begin to play.

She bobbed her head as the percussion slid into the song. She swayed in her place in the bed, feeling just as energized by the song as she was relaxed. She looked up from her musings to find Eren's face screwed up in confusion but not quite in distaste.

Was that a good sign?

Mikasa seemed like quite the stoic character; in all of Hermione's interactions with her- which, to be fair, were limited- she behaved very calm, cool, and collected. But right now, her brow raised in intrigue and her frown was contemplative. *Did she hate it? Did she like it?*

Armin, of course, was just happy to live the experience. He bobbed his head alongside her, trying to experience the music the way he thought a "native" would.

"What are they singing about?" Mikasa asked quietly. *Oh-*

Hermione laughed nervously, "Well... Um, the main lyrics- that she wants to "rim shot"- it's got two meanings. On one hand, the rim shot she wants is a certain way the drums are played- *They have drums, right? They know what drums are... Right?*

"-on the other, is that she's asking to be intimate with a drummer..." She played with her hair nervously. Why am I so flustered? *This is just sex we're talking about- something I've had for Merlin's sake.*

The cell suddenly became overwhelmingly heavy with the awkward silence that followed. Only the soft tones of "On & On" could be

heard through that thick air of awkwardness. She heard Armin cough in discomfort.

She then watched as Eren's face went from intrigued to plain confused, "They would sing about that? Why?"

It's definitely not normal here then, or was he just that oblivious to intimacy?

"Oh, well it's an experience for a lot of people, I guess. They're just singing about how they feel."

He shrugged, uninterested, "I guess."

Hermione's eyes darted to Mikasa who clenched her scarf in a fist and looked to the floor sadly...

Oh... he doesn't know she likes him...

She changed the subject to get rid of this sour mood- she looked at Armin- which he had definitely noticed. *He knows, doesn't he? He knows she likes him.*

"Do you want to hear something different?"

His smile was a bit strained, "Sure, definitely. I want to hear as much as possible."

She smiled at his effort, "Sure thing," and began flipping through her CD book once again, searching for her Nirvana albums.

Finding that "Nevermind" seemed to be a fan favorite, she played it and surprisingly- though not really- Eren seemed to enjoy this genre more.

The song started with fast-beating drums but slowly divulged into that familiar Cobain scream.

"Oh wow," she heard Armin exclaim.

She chuckled. That was quite the appropriate response to hearing *this* for the first time. The song was chaotic and saturated with sound- *they wanted different? She'd give them different.*

They were listening to "Stay Away" and she couldn't help but headbang wildly to the beat- though, not as wildly as she usually would. She normally reserved her grunge and rock albums for late night to early morning "work" hours. The type of hours that left Hermione droopy-eyed and pining for sleep.

That or for when she had her designated "spacing-out" times. "Something in the Way" was *always* perfect for those.

She stopped her headbanging to check in on her visitors.

Mikasa seemed impartial but looked a bit surprised at how much Eren seemed to like it. He wasn't explicit in his pleasure but one could tell he enjoyed this song more than the last.

Armin was smiling at his friends, probably happy that his friends had seemed to start responding a bit more to the music.

They listened to the album a bit more before Mikasa reminded the two that they had an arrangement to attend to. They said their goodbyes, but before they left, Eren faltered in his steps- Mikasa and Armin following suit.

He looked Hermione in the eye.

"I just wanted to take this chance to thank you- for getting the serum on time. If we'd have taken too long, it might've been too late. So thank you- for helping to bring my best friend back."

Armin blushed at the title.

"Thank you," she felt her cheeks warm from the praise, "And you're welcome, of course. I'd do it again in a heartbeat."

He nodded and Mikasa sent her a curious look. They picked up their pace and disappeared up the stairs. She heard the door to the hall click with their exit.

Armin smiled, pleased with the way things had gone that day.

"Well, that was *very* different from what we listened to yesterday."

"Yeah," she let out a puff of laughter, "The genre yesterday was more "Disco, Funk" this was more "Chill, Soul" and "grunge, rock"," she articulated in English.

"Deesko?... Cheel? Rahk?"

She cracked a smile, "Yeah, pretty much. You'll get it once I start teaching you English properly."

The corner of his lip upturned in a slight smile, "True. And luckily, that'll probably start soon. Maybe even as soon as you get moved to a proper room- but anyways, you won't be staying there for long."
Oh?

That piqued her interest. "Oh?"

"I'll explain it more to you later- but this isn't our base, we're just here for some official business."

"Ah, I see... but I'll definitely be staying in the *Scout's* custody... right?"

Armin nodded, "That's the plan."

He leaned his head back against the wall, the lean muscles of his neck becoming more defined. She gulped.

"You see, you'll have to be put on a trial of sorts- and soon. It'll ultimately be decided there, but then again- we're the regiment who took back Wall Maria- *and* with your help," he looked back down at

her and shrugged, "It should be easy enough to force their hand and place you in our custody."

She grinned at his boldness, "Anything I can do in the meanwhile? To help my case?"

"Just keep doing what you've been doing, I guess. Staying non-combative and being overall pleasant company."

"You think I'm pleasant company?" Hermione grinned cheekily.

His cheeks tinted pink, "Of course you are. I wouldn't be here if you weren't."

She laughed, "Well that's nice to hear. Is it official then? Are you my friend?"

"Yeah, I think I am..." he smiled through a shrug, "It's an accurate enough descriptor," he smirked.

"Oh stop," she grinned.

He held his hands up in mock surrender, "Just saying- you know, as your friend..."

He paused. It looked as if he was going to say more, but he hesitated. His hands fell to his sides, "And it would be wrong for me as your friend- I mean I-" he pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration. "I never did get around to asking..."

His Ocean eyes gazed at her with unfiltered kindness, "... How are your wounds healing- you said you got them a long time ago, so I got kind of worried."

"Oh." She instinctively touched the scar on her arm through the sleeves of her sweater.

"They're okay," she raised her scarred arm and with a sweater paw, covered her neck. "They will be," she white lied. She didn't know if

they'd ever be "okay".

He knew she was lying, she knew that for a fact; she was way too obvious and he was way too smart not to notice.

"If you're sure..." Hermione sent him a genuine smile; appreciating the way that he didn't pry any further.

Sensing that their conversation was coming to an end, his hand went to scratch the back of his neck, "I'm probably a bit late so I need to rush-" he began making his way towards the steps, "I won't be able to see you for a couple days- not till the trial."

He chuckled, "It's been a miracle that I've been able to spend the last couple days here in the first place. Personally, I just think they're being a little lenient to us after such a big success."

"Well, that'd definitely be the *kind* thing to do. It's definitely been kind for me."

He smiled a knowing smile, "Yeah?"

She nodded. *Merlin, why are my cheeks so warm?*

He took a step towards the stairs, "I'll see you then?"

"See you then," she waved from her bed.

He nodded and returned up the stairs. She fell back onto her bed with a groan. Once again, she was left wondering *what exactly* was she doing?...

What exactly are you hoping for, Hermione?

...

To get home, of course. And maybe other... "less productive" things as well...

Ugh, she fisted her hair in frustration.

She let her arms fall by her side, contemplating her next moves.

She'd have to gain access into that same forest. She'd have to prove herself to them by then- *by their next full moon.*

That meant she had less than two weeks.

Shit.

If not, then it's a whole 'nother month spent there-most likely more. Her eyes stung with unshed tears.

Why did she have to be such a work junky? Why couldn't she take even more time to see her friends? Why couldn't she have used her vacation time to bug her mates? Because now? Well now, she may never see them again.

She curled up into herself, needing some sense of comfort or safety. After casting a silencing charm, she forced herself to close her eyes and think of ways to help the Scouts. *I just need to reach that forest.*

I need to get to that forest.

... to that...

...

... forest...

She didn't know when exactly she did, but she finally drifted off to sleep.

Hours later, she found herself propped up against cold stone walls, finishing the book from the night before.

She set down the book, closed her eyes, and soaked in the ending. How depressing and yet so very satisfying. They managed to pull off

having child slavery, incest, ice monsters, and killing the main character all make sense in the same book. *This guy's definitely a major nonce, but he sure can write a book.*

She heard faint footsteps going down the stairs. And she genuinely believed that she would've never heard them, if not for the natural echo of the dungeon.

Was it Armin? No. It can't be- doesn't sound like him. Besides, he said he couldn't see me for a while...

Levi? More likely, but, mmm, not quite right...

Mikasa?!

"Hello Hermione," Mikasa hid her lower face behind her red scarf.

Hermione put down her book, "Hi, Mikasa. Is... is something wrong?"

Mikasa shook her head. She looked away, face sliding deeper into her scarf, "Can you tell me more about your music?"

Hermione instantly brightened, "Yeah! Of course!" *Wow, she must've really liked the music... probably the former of the genres more than the latter... but even so...*

She straightened before bringing out her CDs and Discman once more.

They talked about music for a good portion of the night- the rest of that night was spent just listening to it. She found that Mikasa had a lovely voice- or would have a lovely voice? It was mostly an assumption due to the fact that she'd only heard her hum, and *very well*.

She found Mikasa to be kind and refreshing and not exactly shy, but selective on what to say. She didn't say things to say things; when she said something she meant it.

It was such a stark contrast to the intra-work politics she had to sit through for hours on end back home.

Hermione finished up explaining a basic run-through of certain sounds and instruments common in Soul and R&B, and Mikasa gave her a nod in understanding.

"What do they do with their voices, do they sound like that on purpose, or is that just the way they sound?" And the back and forth continued.

Later that evening, after Mikasa had said farewell, Hermione was alone once again, Hermione thought about the interactions she'd had so far.

The one thing Hermione was secretly relishing in was how no one was treating her like a "know-it-all". She was, pretty much, behaving the same way she did back home- maybe even a bit more energetically than usual too. And she was being genuinely listened to about the things that she genuinely liked or was knowledgeable about.

She also noted how they were very kind to her despite them being in a war and despite her being different. But Hermione was also a realist, it wasn't all going to be sunshine and rainbows. Their kindness was very much conditional to her value as a potential ally and even when they were being genuinely nice- they could *and would* put her down if need be.

She could respect that- as long as they respected the fact that she needed to get home.

She sighed- she really was doing that a lot lately- and picked a new book to read for the rest of the day. *Good thing I stored fiction in my beaded bag, because the next few days would surely be boring without them.*

Author's Note:

POC solidarity with this one yall, ahahaha. And Hermione making new friends, yeeeeee- so sweet!

"Aufwachen" from the beginning of the chapter means Wake up btw:)

I have my Tumblr (where I will and do post additional info, one-shots, and memes for this fic) and my Pinterest board for Hermione linked in my bio:)

I also don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

Thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! If you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 8

Authors Note: Sorry for the delayed update... College is a bitch:/ and I have to revise each chapter before posting which is the hardest part for me lol

Chapter 8

No one could say he was a liar-

...

About this.

He was walking down the hall, shadowing Captain Levi and Hange to Hermione's quarters. And while he *did* manage to make good on his promise, it had been a bit more delayed than expected.

It had been three days, to be exact, since she'd been transferred to a room and a week since he'd last seen her. He slid his hand down his face in exhaustion.

It was necessary- knowing what was inside those journals then corroborating them with Eren's newfound memories was essential to their survival.

Even his own newfound memories of Berthold's life... though not as saturated with useful information- helped them come to some very interesting conclusions.

Their steps began to slow as they neared her room.

Reading Grisha Jaeger's journals had to have been the most fascinating, gratifying, yet *demoralizing* thing he'd ever experienced. The time spent over those journals were quite possibly the best *and* worst days of his life.

Hey, so the ocean exists in your world! And sandy snowfields and a whole plethora of other wonders from your book! But also, your real enemies are other humans who think you're the devil for existing!
Yeah!

Yeah...

They stopped in front of her door, the guards posted by her door remained stoic with the curt acknowledgment they gave their superiors.

Hange nodded back before knocking on the door, "Don't be naked! We're coming in!" *Eh?!*

His cheeks tinted at the implication and he coughed to hide his discomfort.

They opened the door to find Hermione's tent pitched, taking up almost all of the space in her room. "Hermione?"

"In here!" He heard her muffled call from inside the tent.

They raised the flap of the tent to find Hermione on a couch, book in hand, nibbling on a... *clear feather?* She waved the hand holding the feather in a hello.

"Hello everyone, long time no see."

He smiled, "It's good to see you again, Hermione- what is it that you're doing with that... feather?"

"Oh, it's candy, I'm just eating it." *Of course! Of course, their candy would be different too.*

Armin nodded, "Ah..."

Hange saw the opportunity and took that lapse in conversation to explain the reason for their presence. "We're here to take you to your "trial"! It should be quick and easy- hmm, well, for the whole *verdict*

part..." They furrowed their brows, "You'll kind of have to stay there for the whole "Wall Maria debrief"-" They rubbed their chin in thought, "Though... you won't even be able to understand anything since you'll have your wand confiscated- but yeah, you'll probably get it back through. I'd say before the end of the day, maybe? Ahaha, but we won't be too s-"

"-Hange."

"Oop."

Levi turned to Hermione with crossed arms, "You'll need to be bound and gagged, Lazy ass. We need to show that we can exert control over you. And hopefully..." he steadied his gaze.

"We won't need to rough you up *too* much."

She waved him off, chuckling nervously, "I'll be fine," she rubbed her forearm, "Getting roughed up doesn't seem too bad in the grand scheme of things..." *What the hell had happened to her arm?*

He thought back to that first day at the castle. *Why would she still be bleeding if It'd happened a "long time ago".* He scrunched his brows in thought.

Well, I'll find out sooner or later.

"Good. The briefing should be starting soon." She began standing up-

"Oi. Put that candy away first." She sighed before nodding dejectedly.

"Separating me from my precious sugar quills- pfft, you're not my dad," she mumbled under her breath as she put away the candy feather, and a spike of involuntary fear shot through his body.

Captain Levi rolled his eyes, "Let's just get this over with." *That's all?*

"Yes. Lets."

Insane. They had quite the interesting dynamic. He'd never seen someone so unlike Levi- that wasn't his colleague or superior- interact with him in this way.

"Armin. Go gag her, or I will."

"Yes Sir." *Why is it always me?* He lamented.

He collected the thick strip of cloth from Hange's hands, "Sorry about this," he sent her an apologetic look.

"It's no problem. Just don't rough me up *too much*," she smiled cheekily.

Hange cackled evilly in the background in response.

He felt his cheeks warm, even his ears felt hot, "Uh... a-alright."

Armin couldn't even hear the Captain's scoff as he approached the girl in front of him.

She looked up at him expectantly, cocking a brow up in question, and he willed himself to focus on the task at hand.

He walked up to her, silently asking for permission with his eyes. Hermione's eyes crinkled at the gesture, brown eyes warm with kindness and the low light of the tent.

He hesitantly brushed her hair back from her face. *It's so soft.*

Shit. Does it seem like I'm staring?

She looked down at her feet and he pulled his hand back, mindful of her comfort.

She looked up and shook her head, "It's okay." Her smile was kind as she brought her hand up to guide his. Armin's hand briefly

brushed against her cheek as she helped him to pull up the upper half of her hair. *Her hands were soft too.*

She held her hair up, waiting for him to begin the process.

He stepped behind her, wrapping the gag around her head through the arms holding up her hair. He then craned his neck to see if the gag had made its mark.

It had.

Full lips were separated by the thick, clothed gag as she eyed him curiously.

He'd noticed this before- when she'd sung that first song only a week before- that her lips didn't pink like everyone else's. Her lips seemed to darken at the top then pink at the bottom. *It... it suited her.*

He snapped back around and continued tying the knot behind her head.

Fuck.

He stepped back and once she felt the absence of his tugs, she let her hair fall around her shoulders.

He walked to stand next to Hange who was practically foaming at the mouth. *Oh gods, Hange. Please. I can't take any more embarrassment.*

Unlike Armin, Captain Levi had gotten to work right away, already halfway done on binding her wrists behind her back.

He took a chance and looked up at Hermione. Despite the usual humiliation people found themselves feeling when restrained, Hermione held herself casually- a stark contrast to the way she held herself against Captain Levi's brashness.

He once again akinned her to the moon: calm and steady, yet ever-changing.

Bindings completed and wand in hand, Levi led Hermione out of her room into the hall while Armin and Hange followed closely behind.

Levi turned back to address him. "No making eyes at each other. Avoid her gaze if she looks. You don't *know* one another, understood?"

Making eyes at... with each other ?

"Yes Sir."

They walked in at a hurried yet controlled pace till they reached the large doors of the conference hall. Levi handed the wand to Hange before opening both of the double doors.

Their entrance led to many stares, most of them directed at Hermione. Whispers began to rise- mostly likely at her appearance and the rumors of her magical powers.

Armin's eyes darted from officer to officer, filing every expression and coherent whisper in a mental record for... later use. But as the whispers became increasingly unabashed and as they neared their seats, Armin risked the chance to try and read Hermione's response to all of this.

Her expression was, of course, hidden by her mass of hair, but her back stood straight as Captain Levi led her next to the Head table. Once there, she was restrained in a similar fashion to Eren during his own trial.

She kneeled stiffly on the floor, eyes darting to everyone in the room. He wanted to reassure her that it'd be over soon, but he could not reveal even the slightest bit of amity. It would give reason for doubt in the Scouts' ability to contain her, ultimately making it harder for them to convince Premier Zachary.

He sat next to Eren and nodded to his friends in greeting. Armin then straightened his posture, giving his attention to whoever was speaking at the time.

After a plethora of formalities, the proceedings went on as planned and as expected, Commander Erwin spoke for most of it.

For the most part, the Commander gave a detailed summary of the journals and a quick description of their current position in relation to Marley's.

But of course, Armin had already been privy to all of this- being one of the only low-ranking soldiers that had even gotten to so much touch Grisha Jaeger's journals.

"-may be possible, even without royal blood, for Eren to wield that power as well."

"That can't be!"

Every gaze in the room fixed themselves on Eren, even Armin's.

What can't be? Do you not have the ability to? Or... is it that you don't want the ability to?

"Eren, you scared me. What was that all about?" Hange turned in their seat to stare up at him. Even the Commander waited patiently for his answer.

"I-uh... I- I..." Are you okay...?

Eren?

"Please continue, our Titan." Armin internally bristled at the term. *He's not just your Titan. He's not just your weapon.* There was a level of dehumanization to the term that just didn't sit right with him.

Eren looked around nervously- almost disoriented. "It's... nothing." *I... don't think it is, Eren. What's been going on?* Ever since he'd

gotten his father's memories, he'd been acting odd.

"Sorry for interrupting the meeting." Eren stared at the table in distress. *He saw something else. Something worse than what he's already told us?*

"Oh? I see... Right..." *Does Hange see something I don't?*

Eren looked up at them in disbelief. *Does he not want anyone to know? "He's at that age... the age when one acts up and randomly yells things." That's... not it at all. But you already knew that, didn't you Hange?*

"Ah, I see. That's unfortunate. He would be at that age, I guess." *Please tell me he didn't actually buy that? This is no teenage phase... There's something deeply wrong here.*

"Eren?" Armin asked, mindful of Eren's guilt-ridden face. *Deeply, deeply wrong.*

They quickly moved on from Eren's outburst in an almost sickeningly neglectful manner. Armin looked to the side to find Eren's eyes narrowed in determination. *I'll just ask him right later. He'll tell me what's going on... right?*

"-do you suggest we do with the Beast Titan?"

"We should start on finding a suitable candidate to be his successor. In the meanwhile, we suggest leaving him in the joint custody of the Scout Regiment and the Military Police-

We can't seem too greedy.

"-Both will conduct their own interrogations and experimentation as they see fit."

If the MPs were more trustworthy, then letting them know of the possible connection to "Zeke Jaeger" and Eren wouldn't be a problem. But as it stood, they were still as corrupt as ever.

The less they know the better...

In addition to the Beast Titan's identity, the only useful information he could pick out of Berthold's memories, thus far, was of Marley's recent state of affairs and the other Titan shifter's identities.

And more about Annie...

He hadn't had the time recently, but he'd go see her soon. Armin sensed he would have a lot to talk to her about the next time he'd visit.

"-find that suitable enough. Does our Queen approve?"

Historia nodded and they began moving on to the next topic.

"And what about this strange... anomaly? Though, what we find strange is entirely relative at this point." Agreed. "This dark witch who claims to be named "Hermione Granger"." Hermione perked up at the sound of her own name and looked over to where the Premier sat.

Her eyes held nothing but mild curiosity. Even at her own trial, she couldn't be intimidated by the possibility of things going awry.

"What do you suggest we do with her?"

"Based on her behavior during the retaking of Wall Maria and her cooperation thus far, we are willing to venture that she can become a powerful ally for us," the Commander replied.

"However, there is no denying the possibility of betrayal. She will be heavily monitored at all times and procedures are currently being planned to take her down should she decide to turn on us."

"So, you believe she should be in Scout custody?" The premier raised an accusatory brow.

"Yes, Premier."

"Mm. What behaviors has she exhibited that make you believe she could be our ally?"

"She helped us to capture the Beast Titan and healed our injured... despite her own *glaring* ailments." By having their rumors either confirmed or denied, whispers from the other military branches began to spread through the room.

Historia craned her neck to scrutinize Hermione, "Truly? Why would a stranger- taken prisoner- be dead set on aiding their captors?"

"We don't know for certain, but we've asked her the same thing. She said working with the military was her best chance of getting home."

"*Home?* Where is this witch's home? Beyond the walls?"

"It *is* a probable possibility, yes. But she gave us an even more bizarre answer."

"Did she now?"

"She claimed to be from another world."

Outrage came from almost everyone in the room. Shouts of "liar" and "deceitful bitch" permeated through the hall. *Sorry Hermione*, he winced on her behalf as she could not make out that those jeers were for her.

Captain Levi stood from his seat, the screech of his chair against the floor gathered the attention of everyone in the room. He wordlessly motioned for Hange to give him something...

Her wand.

He examined it with detached interest. Captain Levi began playing with the wand, scratching his fingernail against the handle, then tapping it against the desk. Armin heard her whimper from the front of the room.

This is their proof. Proof that they can handle her.

Captain Levi motioned to break the wand and Hermione began to cry through the gag. *Was this real? We're these real tears...? Or were they... exaggerated?*

He hid a proud smile. *Oh, she was good .*

"What is this, Captain Levi?"

"This is her magic stick," he drawled, "Her "wand"."

He waved it around haphazardly and Hermione let out another cry as she pulled on her restraints, "She's very attached to it... uses it for everything apparently. We take it and she's useless." *A white lie, yes, but a needed one.*

"If the powers are from the "wand", can't we just take it for ourselves?"

"No, apparently not. She was born with the innate power to wield the wand, but she still needs the wand nonetheless," Hange explained.

"I see... Queen Historia?"

"If you can keep her under control, I see no reason why she shouldn't be in your custody."

Captain Levi returned to his seat once again, still twirling Hermione's wand between his fingers. *Well, he seems to enjoy his part well enough.*

"Then it is settled. Until she can truly prove herself to be an ally to humanity within the walls, she will be in the Scout's custody."

Armin sighed a breath of relief. *One step over, a hundred more to go.*

"Yes, Premier. Queen Historia," Commander Erwin nodded to them in thanks and took his seat.

He glanced at Hermione. These weren't like the tears he found her in when she first played him music. Yes, her eyes were still brimmed with them, but he could find no distress behind them, just expectancy. She was just... waiting.

We're almost done. You'll know soon.

"It seems we have settled everything that's needed to be settled. Though I feel it is best I remind you that that funeral held for our fallen Scouts will be in three days' time... otherwise, we may be adjourned."

The room begrudgingly began to empty as people stalled to watch as Captain Levi brought Hermione from her knees to walk towards the exit.

Ignoring the stares, Captain Levi led her out the door- most likely to her room.

"Armin."

He turned to find Jean eyeing him, "You've spent the most time with the witch. Do you think she's lying about where she's from?"

He already knew his answer, but he hesitated to look cautious, "I- I think there's some validity to what she says. And I don't think the possibility is off the table either."

Jean was neither accusatory nor demanding, "Or maybe you just like her." *U-um...*

"What did you just say, horse face?!"

Thank you, Eren. Their fighting would save him from having to answer to that. *For now, at least.*

He sighed and turned a blind eye to their quarreling. He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to find Mikasa nod to him. He mouthed "later" to her and she began pulling Eren away from the fight to walk by their side.

As Eren mellowed out, he began walking by himself. The rest of the way was spent in silence until they made it to a secluded hall to talk.

"Don't let that horse face get to you Armin, he's just being an a-"

"-he's not wrong."

"Huh?"

Armin sighed and massaged the bridge of his nose, "He's not wrong, Eren. I- I do like her, but as a person-"

Yeah, he scoffed internally. Sure . He liked her as a person. If liking her as a person meant finding himself lost in her gaze or the way her lips looked when she sang or the way her hair felt against skin...

"-She's interesting and unique, but she's also a lot like me and I've never really met someone like that. And... I think I respect her and... That's all," he finished lamely.

"She likes you too," Mikasa replied into her scarf.

"Mm," he nodded. *I've had an inkling but it's still hard to believe...*

"She sees you in the same way," Mikasa reiterated, sensing his doubt.

"Oh." *I- She does, doesn't she...*

"Well... Do you think all that "like" is clouding your judgment?" Mikasa asked in an effort to encourage introspection.

He took a moment to think, "Maybe, but I have a good feeling about this..." His mind involuntarily shifted to the memory of them dancing

together in the low light of the cells, of the sincerity and the genuine happiness he felt radiating off of them both, of their masks being off.

"If you say so, Armin. We trust your judgment," Eren sent him a small smile and Mikasa nodded in agreement.

"Thanks, guys."

He felt an overwhelming amount of love spread through his chest.

Eren clasped his shoulder, "Always, Armin."

Author's Note:

How do you feel I did with Armin's characterization in terms of his cunning and intelligence.

Also how do feel about the progress in Armin and Hermione's friendship/relationship?

Also with this Eren, I felt it was important to also put a spotlight on Eren's mental state and moods and how at this point before the funeral- he's still a bit passionate and lively... of course, we know how this pretty much changes after kissing Historia's hand.

After the next chapter, you can start requesting Hermione one shots for me to do as I'll start posting some of my own then too.

I have my Tumblr (where I will and do post additional info, one-shots, and memes for this fic) and my Pinterest board for Hermione linked in my bio:)

I also don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

Thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! If you have an account and have left a review, and

are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 9

Author's Note: Special thanks to **JackMasterLooter** for the comment left on my last chapter. Your kind, comprehensive comment made me so incredibly happy and just bursting with pride in my work. You made my week! Thank you so much and I hope you're doing well!³

Heads Up: Translations are at the Author's Note at the end as there will be a lot of German/Eldian used in this chapter.

Chapter 9

She leaned back into the couch with a sigh.

Hermione peered across the coffee table to the person currently occupying the seat in front of her. And modal jazz played softly in the background as they conversed.

Apparently, Armin was very partial to jazz music and liked to keep it on as they studied. Hermione could still vividly picture the way his eyes had lit up during his first Miles Davis song, and the way he peppered her with all sorts of questions and queries.

He was particularly intrigued with its history and roots in West African rhythms, oppression, blues, and the foreign concept of an ethnicity having a distinct culture despite living in a multiethnic state.

He had, at one point, even confessed to feeling a sort of kinship with African Americans who had persevered despite their unrelenting oppressors. He was, all around, smitten with the genre- the culture- the sound.

And she could definitely see why.

There was just something about the soothing tones and impromptu solos of the genre that suited him exceptionally well.

And well... There was no denying his appearance had something to do with it as well.

He was currently sitting, legs crossed, on a chesterfield chair- one of which, within the first day of their arrangement, he'd basically claimed as his.

Despite sitting with perfect posture, his shoulders were relaxed and he looked to be quite comfortable. *The perfect posture was probably Levi's doing... if not him, then military life was a likely second.*

He had forgone his usual green coat for a simple blue button-up that matched his eyes with sleeves that were rolled up just past his elbows. And in a similar but much more lazy fashion, she had worn pajama pants and a long sleeve tee.

They managed to keep their meetings fairly casual, like two friends chatting in completely different languages over brunch. *Except it was the afternoon and I was still, essentially, his prisoner.*

"Is this work... for tomorrow?" She asked as he slid her a piece of paper that looked to be a worksheet of sorts. She leaned forward to take a better look.

"Mm, I think we're pretty much done with our alphabets. We'll need to get a start on actual writing."

She practically vibrated in her seat. *Homework! Sweet sweet, graded heaven!* Hermione took the worksheet to examine it with much more detail.

"Oh, Thank you! I wish I would've made one for you, but next time I guess..."

He smiled at her enthusiasm, "I'll look forward to it."

He shook his head in disbelief, giggling at the circumstance, "I've never seen someone so happy to get *homework* before."

Unperturbed, she dreamily replied, "It's just so comfortable, so relaxing," she let her head fall against the top of the couch. She stared into the ceiling of her tent- the same way she did years ago, during the war, "Something familiar and perhaps, a bit close to home."

He leaned towards her, "Really? How so?"

She perked up at the question, regardless of his ulterior motives. Hermione was *very much* aware that he was interested in her answer for two reasons: to gain more possibly incriminating evidence and to just know more. More about her, her other world, her other life...

She had, of course, refrained from telling them too much personal information- especially about her life at Hogwarts, the war, and her role in the war- but she truly saw Armin as her friend and she didn't mind letting him know.

"I went to a school for magic, you see. I didn't learn this on my own. For years I learned to hone this power within me- with some minor complications of course," she subconsciously rubbed the scar on her arm.

She was so lost in thought that she couldn't see him glance at the motion, "But those years were mostly filled with *lectures* and *homework* and *study*, and those years almost felt like... hedonism in the flesh."

"... *Hedonism*?"

"Oh yes, the pursuit of pleasure..."

"And your pleasure was..."

"Knowledge?"

"-Knowledge."

They laughed at the sudden overlapping of their words. She chuckled a bit into her statement, "Mm, yes. I was quite bookish. A know-it-all. A nerd most would say."

He nodded with an amused grin, "Ah, I'm very familiar with the experience."

"Hopefully, you didn't get too much flack for it. I'd hate to see our experiences mirror each other's too much." She began to worry a bit. From what she's learned, children as young as 15 could join the military here, and the training to actually *become* a member took three years. Armin looked much older than 15 but not old enough to have escaped being a child soldier.

Going through your teenage years as a "nerd" in a space designed to reward physicality must've been tough.

He scratched the back of his head, "Aha... just in the beginning... but Eren and Mikasa would always step in before anything became too bad."

"Mm," she nodded, "I understand. I had two hotheaded friends back home. They would, many times, take the bait to a fight- for me, for others. It could get quite annoying, but it was nevertheless endearing." She smiled at the memory of her friends.

We really are made for each other... I could get just as hot-headed as well... Just Gryffindor things, I guess.

Armin chuckled, "The two from the portrait?" he motioned to the picture of her, Harry, and Ron at her graduation.

She nodded fondly.

"That sounds a lot like Eren. Hotheaded would be... would've been an understatement." *Would've? What's that all about?*

"Mikasa actually visited me yesterday, but I haven't seen Eren in a while... how's he doing?"

He took a moment to answer, "He's... okay," he gave her a pained smile. *Hm? Was Eren hurt?*

"Oh- okay. Well, please tell him I said hi... and to get better," she raised a brow to the boy across from her.

He coughed into his fist, "Ehem, um yes. I'll go do that- it's getting late and we have a long day ahead of us-" *Us? But we don't start lessons until the afternoon...*

"-so I'll need to head out."

"Oh- yes, of course." *Oh my, Merlin. Is Eren okay?*

"You should get a good night's rest too. We'll have a lot of work to do soon." *We'll?*

"We'll?"

He sent her a knowing smile. *Very cryptic, sir, very.*

"Well, I'll be off. And you need to get some sleep. You'll have a visitor in the early morning." *What's this all about?*

"Oh really? Anything you can tell me about this... visitor?"

"You've already met them, and they're important." He stage-whispered to her, "I'm not supposed to say anything anyway, but I'll give you that."

She nodded in thanks and stage-whispered back, "I see, thank you."

They both let out hushed laughs at their antics while she walked him out the tent and to her door, "Are we still on for tomorrow?"

"Mm yes, I believe so. But- well, you'll find out tomorrow." *What was going on?*

"Armin?"

"Goodnight, Hermione. Until tomorrow."

She hesitated, "Until tomorrow... Gute Nacht," she watched him walk down the hall and greet the night guard posted outside her door. She closed the door and sighed while leaning against its hard surface. *You know what? Maybe I will get some sleep... .*

After I finish the worksheet, of course.

She put up a silencing charm and trudged to her tent. She finished the worksheet with ease, the simplicity of the work made her yawn with boredom and of course, exhaustion. So much so that after Hermione lazily stuffed her hair in a satin pillowcase, she dozed off at first contact with her bed.

...

She woke to a knock on her door. Her arousal was a violent one and she jumped up, startled, mind racing with confusion. After regaining her boundaries, she calmed her breath and heard another knock at the door.

She released the silencing charm and used the translation spell instead. Hermione yelled, "Wait one second! I'll be at the door!"

She groggily stepped into her slippers and walked out the tent to meet them at the door.

Now, after getting to know them better, she confirmed these two were not a father and son duo. At first glance, it would seem so, but with the difference in last name and overall disposition, it was highly unlikely they were related at all.

"Commander Erwin? I mean- Hallo, Herr Erwin. Hallo Armin," she said by herself. With the rest, she used the translation spell. "Do step inside, the tent will be a much better place to talk."

She was met with an odd stare to the top of her head and- *Oh-*

She hastily threw off her makeshift satin bonnet onto the bed outside the tent. "Ehem, sorry about that- do come in." *Good thing Armin already knows what it's for...*

The Commander brought a hand up to stop her from further opening the door, "No need, Fräulein Hermione. The message is short. We'll need you to help us rebuild towns within Wall Maria." She was about to agree when he continued.

"That is- if your magic is even equipped to handle those types of ordeals- " she internally scoffed. *Of course, it's equipped .*

"Of course I'll help," she looked to Armin who had sent her a soft smile, "Herr."

Hopefully, this assists in releasing me from bloody "house arrest".

"Then it's settled. We'll be having a meeting at mid-morning and Armin will of course be your escort-"

Of course?

She almost raised a brow at the Commander but caught herself before it could happen. *Of course Armin? What are you trying to say...?*

Am I overblowing this?

Probably.

"Bestimmt, Herr... And when will we depart?"

"Two days- if we're lucky."

"Jawohl, Herr Erwin."

"Then I will see you at noon."

"Ohne Zweifel." And the Commander walked away.

"Nice use of the vocabulary, *Miss Granger*," Armin smiled as stepped inside the room. She shivered.

The way he said my name... Oh Merlin, don't think about it. You'll combust.

And he can tell when I'm not using the spell?

Of course, he can! You've been practicing with the man for weeks now, Hermione!

Hermione looked up at him while leaned up against the closed door of her room, "I happen to have this really great *lehrer*..." He chuckled while walking to her tent.

She pushed herself off the door to walk by his side. " *Oh, really?* Then you must be very lucky to have this... great *teacher*," he teased, taking off his jacket and placing it on a rack near the tent's entrance.

"I guess I am," she teased back. She leaned into the couch, practically lying on it, "You know, I feel quite sorry for the man who has to learn *English* from this one teacher. They won't get *any* practical application unless they're having a conversation with them."

He only grinned as he fell gracefully into his Chesterfield chair. "Good thing they talk often," he tossed her a sugar quill before getting his own. *He's been having way too many of those lately. He might even rot his teeth in the process, and it would take a lot to fix- Do they even have dental care here?*

"Don't eat too many- you'll rot your teeth!" She lamented, her dentist parent's words echoing in her ears.

"Oh, like you?" She felt herself flush at the implication of her having "perfect teeth".

"And Besides, Captain Levi makes us brush our teeth three times a day."

Oh?

"You know what? I'm starting to like him more and more..."

He looked fear-stricken.

"What a nightmare! If you two teamed up- I mean Hange and the Captain are scary enough as is... You and him? You'd do great things... scary great things. Like actually making us *like* cleaning toilets or something." *That's the fear? That I could charm them into liking to clean? We captured the Beast Titan together and he's scared of my wiles?* She guffawed internally.

Hermione licked her sugar quill in amusement, "That is *quite* the detailed description, Armin. Have you thought about this before?" She asked slyly.

He blushed instantly, "It's just a thought that's crossed my mind..."

"Mm," she smirked, "Say... I wonder if he'd like to have a *nice, long* discussion on dental hygiene with me," she comically rubbed her chin. "Hmm... perhaps over a cup of tea...? Oooh, he'd like that, wouldn't he?" She smirked.

Armin spluttered in response, flustered by her "threat".

At times, she couldn't believe that this was the same man who she had watched eat a man alive. There was such a large disconnect between this boy called Armin and the Titan form that performed the deed that she oftentimes had to remind herself that they were one and the same.

Hermione showed the thought away, grinning as she shifted to lay on her back while she nibbled on her candy.

"Well, I can't deny that- but only if he was in the *right* company," he shot back, recovered from his previously stuttering state.

"Oh, I can be *right* company. I'm right company for you, aren't I?"

He grinned, "I guess..."

She threw a pillow at him in response, but he only laughed as he dodged.

He then suddenly forced a nonchalant gaze, looking away in mock disregard. He crossed his arms. "We should be listening to some music, don't you think?"

He was quite the actor. If she didn't know any better, she'd think him to truly be so arrogant. But since she did...

She playfully rolled her eyes at him, his infatuation with the genre glaringly obvious, "Of course, Herr Armin. Of course, we can listen to some of your *precious* Jazz."

She decided to put on a more Orchestral Jazz album; those always made her feel like she was living in a movie.

From the way her life was going- she practically could be.

She fell back onto the couch, "Will we be listening to this till mid-morning?" she said before biting into her last piece of candy. Truly, she was just asking if he was staying till then, but she didn't feel like being so direct.

He understood immediately, "That's the plan." Armin chuckled, "You know- at this point, I think I've pretty much been delegated to be the "ambassador" for your world by Commander Erwin."

"Well, if so, you've been performing your duties beautifully," she gave him a chef's kiss.

His eyes crinkled in amusement at the unusual gesture, " *Thank you, Miss Granger* ."

His words were English said in a vaguely German accent that, once again, sent shivers down her spine.

Dear Merlin... Help me.

She changed the subject to distract her racing heart, "So, what should we do till then? Should we go over the worksheet you gave me?" She cleaned her hands of the residue from her finished sugar quill.

"We can..." she pouted at his hesitancy.

"Well... then what do *you* suggest we do?"

"You said that your world was more technologically advanced than ours. I assume that goes for infrastructure as well," he leaned forward in intrigue.

Oh... she smiled. He doesn't just want to *restore* these towns, he wants to *modernize* them.

"I can't lie and say I don't have a *few* ideas. Here, let's write them down." She sat up and patted the seat next to her.

She brought out a blank piece of paper and a muggle pen, because why use a quill when you can use a pen?

They sat close enough to read from the same paper without strain, "It'd be *amazing* if you had towns that ran solely on renewable energy- things like wind and water. Things that you'll never run out of and don't ruin your environment, in return."

Fuck you, fossil fuels.

"Then, you could have a reliable, constant electricity grid."

"Creating a recyclable sewage system to go along with an underground, clean water pipe system would be nice. Oh- and probably a faster form of transportation between the walls and towns- a water-powered railway," she printed neatly, turning it into a bit of teachable moment for his English.

On the same paper, he wrote what she repeated for him in Eldian. "Um... I'm going to need you to explain half of those terms..."

The more she explained the wider he grinned.

Armin's eyes gleamed at her clarification, "This- this is great, Hermione!" She flushed under his praise. "I bet our engineers would have a field day with this..."

"I just hope we have enough resources for all of this-"

"Oh don't you worry about that, I've got you covered."

"Really?" he raised a skeptical brow and she couldn't blame him.

"A well-placed *Geminio* and we'll have everything we need."

He smiled at her use of we. "We also have another energy source we can use. We call it Iceburst stone and it's what we use to power our 3D maneuvering gear- though, I'm not sure what effects it has on the environment."

Hermione giggled, "That just means more experiments for Hange," they laughed at the thought of Hange cooing over a new project.

As their laughter tapered off, Amrin's eyes widened with ingenuity, "I think I might have a good idea for organizing the electrical grid- and all the pipes too. We won't have it localized unless it's *absolutely* necessary. We'll also need to-"

They poured over books for hours, using this time not only to better their use of the other's language but to rest and listen to the other read or speak about architectural design. Having set a general plan, they veered off into a different kind of conversation.

"-but genuinely, do you think getting in his "good graces" will help me get back to the forest in time for your next new moon- or even full? I've already missed your last ones- and there's really no time to waste here."

He paused to think and word his statement carefully, "I think anyone would agree- having Captain Levi as an ally would be to their advantage."

"Hmmm..." she tapped a finger against her cheek.

"What is it?"

"I know that I'm going to have to try to recreate the conditions that landed me here. It'll be the best way to find out if I can get back home... I just don't know if it was the Scouts' presence that drew me in or the forest's itself..."

He turned to meet her eyes with a sympathetic look, "I'm sorry to say, Hermione, but you'll have to *truly* prove yourself. You probably won't be able to step foot in that forest for months."

She groaned, slumping against the back of the couch. He patted her shoulder awkwardly.

She stared despondently in front of her, "... Do you think I'll ever get back home?"

He paused and rolled his head to lay against the top of the backrest, "... I don't know, Hermione."

They laid there, slumped, shoulder to shoulder on her couch as Jazz played in the background.

Oh sweet and lovely Lady, be good! Oh Lady, be good to me... !

She drowsily nodded her head to the song.

Some day, when I'm awfully low, when the world is cold, I will feel a glow just thinking of you and the way you look tonight.

Are the stars out tonight? I don't know if it's cloudy or bright, 'cause I only have eyes for you, dear.

Her foot tapped to the beat as she began nodding off.

After what felt like forever, a knock sounded on her door. She sat up instantly, cursing herself for losing track of time, "It must be close to mid-morning, let's-"

"Armin?"

He was fast asleep on her couch, unaware of the highly important meeting they were supposed to be at. Armin scrunched his nose in his sleep and shifted to find a more comfortable position. Despite being crunched for time, she couldn't help but stare.

He's so pretty...

She resisted the urge to brush the hairs framing his face to rest behind his ear.

Ugh, don't be such a creep .

She gently shook his shoulder, "Armin. Hey, it's time to wake up. We've got to be at the meeting. Armin?"

Another knock could be heard, a bit more insistent than the last.

He stirred and blinked owlishly at her, Ocean eyes becoming more and more aware with each blink.

"Wha-... what's going on?" He sat up slowly and brought his hair out of his ponytail. He shook his again and combed his fingers through his hair to tie it up once again.

Merlin, is my heart racing?

"Armin, it's close to mid-morning. We've got to go."

"Oh- right, right. Let's go. Sorry about that, I don't usually fall asleep like that," he walked over to the rack to put on his coat.

"It's no problem..."

She smoothed over the wrinkles of her clothes- *these are my pajamas...*

"Oop- Sorry- Give me a sec," and she transfigured her sleepwear into a mint green, bishop-sleeved maxi dress. "Okay- now let's go."

He quirked a brow at her, but she could see the beginnings of a blush on his cheeks. She sent him a sly smile as she shrugged. *I guess he's never seen me in a dress before... I haven't worn one here yet, have I?*

She thought back- *I guess I haven't...*

She walked over to nudge him towards the exit, "No time to waste, Ocean eyes. We've got a meeting to attend."

"Ocean eyes?" His eyes lit up at the nickname.

"Mhm," she nodded enthusiastically, "Your eyes are like seeing two whole Oceans surrounded by a whole bunch of face," she chuckled while chaotically gesturing to his face.

"They even look like this beach I used to visit with my parents back home," she said fondly, walking with a bit of skip to her step.

She closed the door behind her and nodded in thanks to the guard as they walked down the corridor.

She watched as he stared, gobsmacked, at the end of the hall. His face was tinted pink and he let out a shaky breath. *Is he alright?*

Of course, he isn't, Hermione. He's never even seen the Ocean before, never mind the fact that he didn't even know it existed till a couple of weeks ago...

She placed a hand on his upper arm to soothe him. They stopped in the middle of the corridor and he looked down to meet her gaze, "*When you see the Ocean- because I trust that you will... you'll find that you will not be able to look in a mirror without being reminded of it,*" she slightly jested.

"That you'll always have a little piece of it with you," she brought her hand back to her side and set out to continue walking when he stopped her.

"Hermione."

He brushed the hair away from the side of her face to place his hand on her shoulder, "I... Thank you," he sent her a small smile, eyes crinkling with sincerity.

I- he... Merlin, I think I-

To save face from her rapidly beating heart and star-struck gaze, she forced herself into "Hermione mode"- automatically quoting Shakespeare from memory.

"I speak as my understanding instructs me and as mine honesty puts it to utterance," she began walking forward.

He chuckled at her use of "The Winter's Tale" quote, following after her. She was pleased to find that he had recognized the quote- even despite it being awkwardly translated to Eldian. It was probably due

to her *extremely* zealous spiel about the play during one of their first meetings...

"I can't wait to read it when I'm fluent."

"Trust me. It's *much* better to watch- Maybe one day- when we've cracked the code, you can travel to my world instead."

"Only if I have you as my guide," he teased, truly doubtful that it would ever get to that, but she could tell he was happy nonetheless.

They walked the rest of the way in comfortable silence, twisting and turning till they reached a room only Armin truly knew.

When they reached their destination, Armin opened the door for her. She nodded to him in thanks and found herself in company with the usual suspects, along with a few more... unfamiliar high-ranking officers in the Scouts.

She was met with their expectant stares.

Merlin, let's just hope we can deliver...

Author's Note:

Hopefully, Armin and Hermione's interactions don't seem forced or sped up. I want their relationship to be as plausible and natural as possible.

If their relationship seems to be going too fast in a bad way please let me know! **To clarify, Hermione has been in Paradis for a little over three weeks at this point, basically a month.**

Translations:

Gute Nacht: Good Night

Fräulein: German language honorific for unmarried women, comparable to Miss in English

Herr: German language honorific for a man, corresponding to Mr. or in direct address to Sir

Bestimmt: For sure! (Enthusiastic in a way)

Jawohl: Absolutely, Affirmative, and/or Yes sir!

Ohne Zweifel: Without a doubt

Lehrer: teacher

You can start requesting Armione one shots for me to do, I've already posted two on my ao3 account and my Tumblr (both of which use the same username as my FFN acc)

I have the Tumblr (where I will and do post additional info, one-shots, and memes for this fic) and my Pinterest board for Hermione linked in my bio:)

I also don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

Once again, thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! Normally, if you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

Hope you enjoyed!

Author's Update

Sorry!

So I can't update for a while since- where I live- a super typhoon hit my city directly and WiFi is scarce, and so is my energy, I'm very sorry about that! I'll have chapter 10 out in probs more than a couple week...

Thanks for understanding...

Chapter 11

Author's Note: Translations are at the Author's Note at the end as there will once again be a hefty use of German/Eldian used in this chapter.

Chapter's kinda corny but also kinda cute so take that as you will:)

Chapter 10

She groaned in pain, using that groan as a placebo for *actual* relief.

Bloody freaking Merlin, that hurts.

Hermione stumbled as she let the rock fall into an empty clearing. The stress of levitating such a huge mass of rubble for the umpteenth time left her joints aching and her muscles straining.

I haven't "exercised" this much since the War.

"Next piece!" Someone called... For what felt like the hundredth time that day.

"Jawohl!" She shouted even though she felt like dying inside.

It wasn't nearly this bad after the Battle of Hogwarts...

That's because you had other Wizards to help you- now, you're just the one.

" *Wingardium Leviosa.*"

She blew a stray curl out of her face as she strained under the weight; the curl, starting to become more of an irritant than the literal boulder she was made to levitate.

Not really "made" if you wholeheartedly agreed, Hermione.

Not now, Logic.

She felt the ground shake as she dropped the rubble into the clearing. Hermione swayed on her feet and let out a shaky breath.

Though her body ached all over and her mind felt numb, she knew it could be so much worse.

If not for Armin's plan...

Gosh, she internally exclaimed- thinking back to all the speculations she'd made before she'd gotten to know him. He really was the planner of the group .

He had managed to organize the construction in such a way that allowed for both her and Eren to handle most of the heavy lifting while others worked on the more delicate processes simultaneously.

It was quite efficient in practice and though she could easily do the more detail-oriented work, she had agreed to this plan, thinking it would be the best way to save time.

And to be honest, his plan had been much more lenient than this- *much, much more.*

The problem was her. She had promised too much- promised away parts of herself that she didn't even have. Promised her constant strength, her energy, her health.

So much so, that not even the nights could wash away her pain. Though, if asked, she'd swear up and down that she was doing just fine.

She leaned on her knees to catch her breath.

It had been weeks since they'd first started and there had rarely been time for rest- the days were long, the nights were restless, and soothing charms and Dittany could only do so much for chronic pain.

Merlin, I really wish I could see a healer right now.

She sluggishly looked over at the 15 meter Titan carrying a boulder on his shoulder.

The Scouts had not *explicitly* explained Titans to Hermione- even when they questioned her and she questioned back those first few days in the dungeon.

She'd already accepted that they'd given her the bare minimum to work with- *hell*, she didn't even know Eren was one until they'd first begun reconstruction. But that first time watching Eren transform into that 15 meter, *cognizant* Titan really put things into perspective.

She knew practically *nothing* about them- only their weak spots, how they look during transformation, that they are or once were human, and that only Eldians can be them.

And to her- that was nothing.

Hermione's curious, researching nature was *begging* for more information. But she could be patient- she could do that...

I think...

Through damp lashes, she continued to peer up at Eren's Titan form. She then wiped some of the sweat off her eyes.

At least Eren is helping me, poor guy. I couldn't even imagine what it would be like if he had to do this all alone.

Especially with him being so... distant.

Hermione hadn't known him long, but even *she* could tell something was... off. Must've been his friends' reactions that were so telling...

Maybe at dinner, we can-

"Last one, Witch!"

She stilled with pent-up rage. *I have a name you know*, she thought bitterly- the combined stress of the day and their interruption severely messing with her mood.

She nodded stiffly, unable to articulate anything kind or neutral at that moment.

She begrudgingly walked over to the next boulder. She tried taking a few deep breaths before her next go but was only able to muster a couple short, shaky gasps.

She looked around nervously. Hermione felt the pressure of many impatient, watchful eyes aimed at her.

I can do this. I can do this. These are people's homes, homes they can't go back to unless I pick up this stupid... Bloody... Boulder.

Despite her entire body telling her no- protesting with every possible sign they could give her- she carried on. Her arms convulsed and sweat poured down her cheeks as she levitated what felt like her millionth rock of the month.

Hermione could faintly hear cheers in the distance as she watched the boulder land on the clearing of dirt. She smiled, despite the fact that she had fallen onto her knees.

Now all they had to do was cut it into smaller chunks and-

Copper?

Why do I taste copper?

"Hey, Witch!"

"Oi, Witch!"

Shut up. Everyone shut up...

"Witch?"

"What's going on with the witch?"

Merlin- my head, my throat...

"Oi, someone go check up on her!"

"Not me! I'm not getting anywhere near her. She could be tricking us or something."

Shut up!

"Hey! What's going on here?" *Armin? Oh, thank Merlin.*

She collapsed onto the dirt, unable to lift her own weight any longer. She coughed, feeling the dusty air enter her lungs, the taste of her own blood more prominent than ever.

"Hermione?!" She could only groan in response. *Armin...*

She felt a hand hold up her head as another held her cheek, "Hermione, y-you're..." his fingertips slid down to her neck. *Fuck-were her scars bleeding too?*

"You're going to be okay. Okay? Can you hear me? Hermione?"

She softly nodded against his hands, tears bred from pain welling in her eyes.

"Okay. Okay, let's get you up, alright? You'll be okay, Hermione. I promise."

She heard a rush of footsteps coming closer, "Armin, what happened?" What sounded like Mikasa asked.

She heard other voices echo the sentiment.

"She collapsed- most likely due to fatigue from overworking. She's also bleeding. Her nose, her neck, her arm, all of it's bleeding," he gasped through what sounded like tears.

He's so worried.

It'll take a lot more than this to kill me, Armin. Don't worry.

She heard the familiar whip of 3D maneuvering gear, "Oi brats, what's with all the noise." Levi.

"Captain, she's bleeding. A lot. We'll need to be careful on how we move her."

"Tch- move. I'll carry the brat. Go send for a medic and bring them to her tent."

"Yes, Captain!"

She felt herself become weightless. Levi's footsteps were smooth and gentle despite the harsh delivery of his words.

Awe... he really does care... Ahahaha, he cares!

She let out a hoarse chuckle in her delirium. He's a cold on the outside, warm on the inside type of guy, huh?

"Oi- what the hell are you laughing for, lazy ass?"

I'm going to have so much fun with this.

Levi carried her until she recognized the familiar feel of her bed underneath her. *How'd they know the way to my bedroom so fast?*

Armin must've let them know *everything* . She smiled at her ceiling. *Sneaky bastard- can't believe I still like you.*

"The medic will be here soon so hang tight."

She attempted at a nod, but stuck with a simple groan in acknowledgment, being that most of her energy was allocated to the hand clutching her wand.

Medic? To try and heal her? To stop the bleeding?

But muggle techniques won't...

Shit, shit, shit.

Forget the pain, forget the bleeding- they're going to see my scars!

She forced herself to look around. There's so many people here- many of them relatively recent acquaintances, or rather, Armin's friends.

She shut her eyes tight- in half part due to pain, in other part due to irritation.

I can't stand this- the vulnerability, the shame of having my scars, my past being wide out in the open.

Not your fault, Hermione. It wasn't your fault. It was all Bellatrix. She did this to you, not you.

"The medic's here," she didn't have the strength to reopen her eyes, but she did recognize Armin's voice.

"Oh- thank Sina, I was beginning to worry you wouldn't find them," she heard Sasha exclaim.

"Sorry, sorry. Hope it hasn't gotten too bad."

"No- she's, relatively, in the same state as when you found her," Jean consoled.

She heard the rustling and clinking of supplies, and the shuffling of feet coming closer to her bed.

"Let's see here..." the medic immediately began administering her nosebleed.

"Other than her neck and arm, are there any other areas with open wounds?"

"None that we've seen."

She attempted at a squirm- to warn them of the futility of their methods- but was promptly ignored.

"Mm."

Hermione felt something cool hit her neck- *that won't work*. She grit her teeth.

"Eek!" She heard the medic shout.

"What- What is it?"

"Her neck- it's rejecting the poultice!"

Hermione began convulsing on the bed, her wounds opening further. She shrieked in pain.

This is worse than the first time I tried using muggle methods.

"Hermione!"

Merlin above, that hurts like a bitch! Ah!

She felt the side of her bed dip with the weight of someone leaning on it- *Armin?*

A familiar laugh began to manifest in her mind. *No- not her. Not now-*

She heard a sizzling come from the base of her neck and she couldn't even begin to imagine what they were seeing come out of her wound.

Hermione whimpered as she heard Bellatrix's manic laughing ring in her ears.

"What the hell is going on?!" *Maybe if I wasn't under such immense pain, Levi, I'd tell you,* she thought bitterly- though, she wasn't mad at him, more of the situation she was put in.

"I'm sorry to say, but I don't know! This seems beyond modern medical practices!"

"Then fucking wipe it off, wipe off whatever you put on her!" *He cares!*

A sharp cackle interrupted her exaltation. *Shut up, you crazed witch!*

"Yes. Please wipe it off." She felt his hand entwine with hers. *Oh, Armin. Ever the diplomat.*

"Yes yes. Right away," they sounded nervous. Hermione grit her teeth as she felt cloth rub against her wound. *Screw you!*

"Unh!"

"Sorry, sorry. This should be over soon," they continued to wipe off the poultice as gently as they could, "The best we can do is bandage her wounds and hope for the best."

Hermione's pain began to wane and the manic laugh quieted, but she still lacked the energy to move, "There's nothing we can do until she can start speaking again, she- she might know something we don't."

"Mm. You should get started on dressing her wounds."

"Oh! Of course, Captain Levi."

She squirmed, the exhaustion causing the logic to leave her body. *No, stop! Don't touch my arm. Stop!*

"Hey, it's going to be okay, you'll be okay," Armin cooed.

She heard similar words of encouragement, she could even single out Mikasa's hum in agreement. Her friends. She truly had friends here.

Tears leaked through her closed eyes. She felt her left sleeve start to roll up her arm.

She felt the air turn stale and a stiff silence washed over the group.

Weak- so weak... and now they know.

"Did someone-" Hermione let out a wracking sob.

Quickly, as to stop the bleeding- and to hide the sight of the carved word on her arm- the medic began bandaging her wound.

A hand gently began stroking through her curls as best as they could, "It's alright. It's alright, Hermione. They're not here. They can't hurt you anymore." She nodded against his hand, soothed by his words. It was times like these that left her glad to have aided in saving him on that faithful day.

"Was that a word? On her arm?" *Connie... please shut up.*

"... Yes, Connie. It was..."

Hermione scrunched her face in discomfort- the combination of physical pain and embarrassment taking a toll on her.

She felt Armin's hand squeeze hers in reassurance.

After the medic dressed her neck and deemed that there were no other injuries, they gathered their supplies, "Well, I'll be taking my leave, but I'll come back tomorrow to redress her wounds."

Jean answered them with gratitude, "Thank you for your effort."

"Mm, you're welcome. Please try and get some rest, Fräulein Granger."

I'll try.

As soon as they left she heard Connie readdress Armin, "You've been learning her language for a while now, right? So... Do you know what it means?"

"... No- I don't... It doesn't seem like the type of word you'd be introduced to when you've just begun a language."

There was a beat of silence.

Did they understand it to be an epithet, a slur, a curse on her very being?

"Ah, I see," Levi sighed, "I'll leave her to you. I'll go inform the Commander of what happened here."

Apparently, Levi did... or might...

A chorus of "Yes Captains" echoed in the room.

She heard Levi greet someone on his way out, "Guys? Guys, what's going on?" *Eren? Was he finally done for the day?*

She listened as they recapped the events to him. He seemed to go quiet before quietly asking, "... Will she be okay?"

"We don't know..."

I'll be fine, she grit her teeth- but her scoff in resilience translated more into a groan of pain.

Armin rubbed gentle circles into her palm in response.

"And you said there was no us..." Connie chuckled. *What on Earth is Connie even talking about?*

Wait, us?

"That was weeks ago." Hm?

"Eh?! You're not denying it?!"

He means us, us? Like Us... as a-? So it wasn't just all in my head...

He fancies me...

And I reciprocate...

Does that mean...?

"Armin?" She heard Eren ask in confusion.

Oh my... he really is just that oblivious.

"I'm not confirming it either, Connie..." Armin sighed in exhaustion.

"Confirming what?" *Eren*, she internally growled in frustration.

"Eren..." Mikasa sighed in defeat.

It seems like everything is pissing me off... except Armin of course- and Mikasa.

Merlin, I do not feel like myself, she lamented.

Jean began, almost one-sidedly, arguing with Eren over his apparent ignorance of anything romance-related. Even Connie and Sasha got in on it- going back and forth between dangling the truth in his face and calling him stupid.

But all he did was remain calmly confused.

It was cute- truly, but she wanted- no needed for them to just shut the hell up!

With Armin being Armin, he noticed her annoyance right away and tried to lessen her stressors, "I'm sorry, I really am- but I think it'd be

best if you guys left- just for the moment."

"... Oh, yeah- of course. C'mon guys, let's go."

As they left, she heard Eren scoff, "I'd think Armin would tell me if they were together or something."

The sentence almost gave her the strength to open her eyes and give Armin a very "done" look.

I'd think it'd be obvious looking outside in...

Huh.

We have been quite obvious, haven't we? We sit together during meal times, we touch every chance we get, and he escorts me almost everywhere.

... is there an Us?

He stayed by her side, singlehandedly saving her from the torture of being touch starved during such a painful experience.

"Do you want to listen to some Michael?" *Oh, he knows me so well.*

Hermione's eyes gleamed under her eyelids. *Merlin, yes!* She nodded as wide as she could.

"Alright, alright," he chuckled, endeared by her response.

He spent the rest of the afternoon doting on her- even though she thought she didn't need it.

At one point, she regained enough energy to open her eyes and even croak out a few sentences.

She lifted her fingers as much as she could, "Armin, c-can you help me bring my wand arm towards my scars?"

"Yes, of course," he gently lifted her wrist to her wounds.

After casting the appropriate, interim spells over her bandaged wounds she melted into the bed, a feeling of relief washing over her.

"Hermione- about your arm-"

She looked away in shame, "-please, Hermione. Will it heal? Will you be okay?"

She gave the question some thought. In all honesty, she had given up on the idea of a "cure" years ago. And though it wasn't impossible- it was certainly, currently unattainable.

She shook her head, "No- No, I don't think it will ever heal," her eyes began to water, "And that's all I'm going to say on the matter."

He nodded in understanding.

"Then let me stay with you tonight."

She raised a brow at him.

He spluttered, hands held in front of him in defense, "I- I- th-that's not what I meant. I mean- just till you go to sleep," he scratched the back of his neck.

He's so cute, she cooed through unshed tears.

He wiped them away before they could fall on her cheeks, and let the hand rest by her side, "I won't stay the whole night- I'll need a good night's rest too. I've got an example to set," he joked.

"Well, you set it well. I don't know how you do it- how you balance everything."

"Blame it on the Military," he shrugged, cheeks flushing pink at her praise.

Hermione smiled at his humility. "No, I have a feeling that's all you," she slightly slurred, still tired from the day's events.

Armin lifted his hand to rest it on her head.

He cleared his throat in an attempt to hide his blush, "Well, I'm glad you think so."

Still in a pain-induced daze, she hummed as he ruffled her hair affectionately.

"And I'm glad you're able to talk again- but I really think you should take it easy for the rest of the night."

She nodded a bit wider, hoping to receive more head pats.

She closed her eyes as he indulged her, "Do get some sleep, Hermione. I'll make sure to be here in the morning."

She nodded once again- this time softly, the sleepiness already setting in.

"Goodnight, Mondlein," was the last thing she heard before she finally dozed off.

...

Hermione woke to the light sound of footsteps. She strained her sore neck to see that it was Armin pacing by her bed.

"Oh- I'm sorry if I woke you-

"No. No, I woke all by myself," she tried to sit up.

"Here, let me," he leaned his knee on her bed to help her sit up, then quickly left her bed to stand at her side.

"Thank you," she croaked.

"My pleasure," he gave her a pained smile.

They stared at each other- in most parts relief, in other parts awkwardness.

"... Guten Morgan?" She added sheepishly.

"Good morning," he replied in English, a slight smile beginning to grow on his face.

She tried moving her legs but felt an insurmountable amount of soreness in them.

Hermione wanted to walk to the makeshift mess hall and get breakfast by herself, but, of course, the endeavor was futile.

She sighed in defeat.

"When do you think I can start walking again?"

He massaged his nose bridge and sighed, "Hermione- how many times have I told you not to overexert yourself-"

Endeared by his worry, she chuckled despite the hoarseness of her throat, "-a million?"

"Yes, a million," he sighed again.

Armin sat on the edge of her bed, gently placing his hand just a hair's breadth beside her own. His face was grave- he couldn't seem to find the humor in the situation like she had.

"Why do you *insist* on doing this, Hermione? Why can't you take care of yourself the same way you take care of everyone else?" His eyes were pained, but she could tell he held a certain fondness for the flaw nonetheless.

Her smile vanished as he finished his question and she fidgeted with the loose folds of her bedsheet.

She felt conflicted. No one had ever reprimanded her so bluntly before, no one had ever put their foot down for her health like he had.

Her childhood friends found her work habits annoying yet endearing- they never *truly* tried to stop her, finding it a part of her... which it was...

But...

But it was a part of her that was also simultaneously killing her.

She knew that of course- and sometimes she didn't care.

Merlin, that's depressing...

She loved her friends for letting her be herself- she really did, but she also felt a bit resentful that they hadn't recognized how enabling her was also killing her.

But that wasn't their job, it was mine. If I can acknowledge it- I can work on it.

I'll work on it.

She doubled down.

But she also knew that if *she* didn't do the work... who would? Who would put in the same effort to reach the same goals- to receive the same genuine results?

... No one.

I'm the Brightest Witch of my Age, the face of Magical Creature's Rights activism, and a muggleborn who became a hero for the Wizarding World... and I didn't get there by being selfish.

I've had to give up so much of myself for it all... for Harry, for Ron, for the War... it's all I know.

It's all I feel like I can do.

She sighed, recognizing her destructive thought process.

When I get back home... When I get back home I'll be better... I promise...

She looked tiredly into his Ocean eyes searching for the right words to say, "Because... because if I don't, who will?" She answered despondently. Hermione closed her eyes and sighed.

"For as long as I can remember, I've had to be the brain, the neck, the spine- bearing the weight, keeping everything together, getting everyone on the right track. I- I don't know anything else and I... I think I'm scared to..."

Her lip trembled at the confession and she blinked away fresh tears, "And what would I be- who would I be w-without that."

He gave her a sad smile, "You'd be healthier, Hermione," he brushed the stubborn, stray curls away from her face and rested the hand on her cheek. Hermione felt her cheeks warm under his ministrations.

A-Armin...

He brought his free hand to hold hers as he continued speaking, "Rely on me, Hermione," he tightened his hold.

"Share your burden with me- for as long as you can," he pleaded, voice soft yet firm.

He looked down at their joined hands and held her own close to his heart, "Break free, be more. Be your truest, *healthiest* self."

He steeled his gaze towards her, "Be healthy with me."

New tears sprang forth- this time from relief, from joy, from all things good and right with the world.

"Armin," she gave his hand a squeeze, "I would like that. I would like that very much."

She tried for a shaky smile.

He rubbed gentle circles into the back of her hand, "Good, that's... good." He sent her a gentle smile that melted her heart.

This man is dangerous- so very dangerous. She nuzzled further into his palm.

He looked conflicted for just the slightest moment before leaning forward to place a kiss on her forehead.

Oh my-

"I'll go bring you breakfast," She felt an involuntary grin spread across her face, "No- no stay. Just for a little while longer," she pleaded with her warm doe eyes.

Hermione knew it was a weakness of his and she smirked to herself as he conceded to her wish.

"Alright," he grinned, knowing he had been played, "Just for a little while."

"Mm," she nodded, pleased with herself.

They managed to spend a good portion of the morning in each other's company- up until Armin was called to supervise the reconstruction.

"I'll make sure to ask the guard to bring you breakfast," he said as he stood from the bed.

"Mm, Sehr aufmerksam," she nodded to him.

"Nothing to thank me for," he replied in English with a smile, then turned to leave.

Look at my little soldier boy go.

She sighed.

If only a little while could last forever...

But she knew her time with him was limited- guarded by the ticking clock of her stay in this world.

Because she *would* get back, *no matter what*.

Whether it be in 6 months or a year, a decade or a lifetime- she'd find a way to come back home.

No matter what, no matter what. She sighed into the headboard. *No matter what...*

Author's Note:

Hope you guys like Armin and Hermione's relationship so far and how they interact.

If their relationship seems to be going too fast in a bad way please let me know! **To clarify, Hermione has been in Paradis for two months now.**

Translations:

Jawohl: Absolutely, Affirmative, and/or Yes sir!

Fräulein: German language honorific for unmarried women, comparable to Miss in English

Guten Morgan : Good Morning

Mondlein: The meaning will be told through the story:P

Sehr aufmerksam : Directly translates to "(thank you) that's very kind of you". It's a heartfelt way of thanking someone that has done

something kind for you.

You can start requesting Armione one shots for me to do, I've already posted three on my tumblr.

I have the Tumblr (where I will and do post additional info, one-shots, and memes for this fic) and my Pinterest board for Hermione linked in my bio:)

Once again, thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! Normally, if you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

I also don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

Hope you enjoyed!

9-11(okay i know this title looks weird)

List of things that have happened between Chapters 9-11 (a lil break from full-on chapters)

After 2-3 weeks I might be moving this chapter to before Chapter 11 but we'll see...

Please Read: If any of these interest you, you can request for me to do a one-shot about it that will be posted on my tumblr, linked in bio, or you can head over to my archive acc with the same author name and story title and read them there.

Hermione teaches Armin how to make coffee after he realizes that's what Berthold, Reiner, and Zeke were drinking. He found her sipping it one afternoon and found the smell appetizing and familiar. He then asked about it and she began explaining what it was and how to make it. (Yes it was very cute with many eager questions asked by Armin, a lot of fumbling, (un)necessary touches and fun banter,)

They occasionally dance together when a really funky song comes on. She teaches him all the popular moves and their names. He admires how well she dances when in reality she's not quite as good as he proclaims/thinks- but her cheeks heat at the praise anyway.

They also tried slow dancing once but realized all too quickly how intimate it was- and they've been trying (and failing) to avoid those types of situations and feelings. But they sometimes swing each other around in circles, line dance, or do other kinds of dances that require touch.

Armin always sits either across from Hermione or next to her during meal times with the other scouts. And sometimes their thighs touch and hands brush up against each other on purpose.

Armin is very fascinated with and admiring of Hermione's lower body, specifically her ass and thighs- but he lowkey feels disgusted with himself for thinking about it too much, but also doesn't care enough to stop and continues to admire anyway.

Mikasa mostly visits alone or occasionally, with Eren in tow just to listen to music and talk about semi non-personal deep shit like lyrics and being a workaholic/giver. With the amount of translation and discussion, Mikasa is practically learning English too.

Jean talks with her when they're out on whichever construction site they happen to be at. He mostly asks about her world and sometimes jokes about the more liberated fashion choices she's mentioned. He's kind and charming but keeps an obvious wall between them. He also engages with her in a more casual manner when other Squad members are there too.

Sometimes Armin likes to sit and listen to Jazz as he compares their hands, from the size to the way her palm is lighter than the rest of her skin, to the way her calluses are from writing and wand wielding while his' are from sword fighting.

Hermione likes to braid and play with Armin's hair sometimes.

Sometimes Hermione allows herself to cry for the friends she might not be able to see again.

Hermione worries and thinks about what the rest of her world is thinking, especially her friends. "Has time not changed and I'll land right when I departed or will they think me dead or missing, captured in some sort of way?"

Sasha and Connie visit to dance and hound Hermione for treats but Sasha more so. Jean sometimes joins them to make fun of their dancing but joins in anyways.

Levi makes Hermione clean with everybody else, sometimes by hand, sometimes with magic, or both... depends on how much she

sasses him that day

Levi and Hermione did end up having a chat over tea.. and it actually went smoother than expected. (Hermione thinks he secretly likes being called Uncle Levi)

Hange and Hermione work with engineers on much of the renewable energy ideas and the idea for the train. They also discuss the more strategic aspect of it with Armin.

Hermione and Hange have fanatic, scientific discussions occasionally... and over coffee which Hange turns out LOVING (surprisingly not).

Hermione secretly, but not so secretly does arithmetic equations obsessively to figure out how and when she'll get home. Sometimes Armin will have to pick her up from her desk or the couch and drag her to bed.

Hermione becomes a regular at the orphanage and it seems that squad Levi and any additional scouts really do their bonding together and with Hermione there. It also helps that the children absolutely adore her.

Armin blushed and began stuttering once when she was only wearing a large sweater that bared one of her shoulders. They were having language lessons and it took him a while to focus... she never wore "just a sweater" again.

Hermione explains fish to amphibian to the first mammal to ape to human evolution- which Armin is ecstatic about. "We come from the Ocean?! Oh wow!"

She notices that Eren looks at her oddly, more like he's trying to figure her out but not in a negative or appreciative way- just in confusion.

Authors Note:

I don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 11

Author's Note: Translations are at the Author's Note at the end as they will be using German/Eldian in this chapter.

Thanks to EricFreak for that amazing review. I've replied to you privately, that goes for most other reviews as well- pls check inboxes for my replies:)

Chapter 11

"Hallo! Hallo! Ohh that tickles- okay, oh-." The children surrounded Hermione, curious about her dark skin and even darker cloud of hair.

"Oh-" They pulled her into a shaded area to further ogle her in comfort and he felt a part of him mourn at the loss of seeing her skin bathed in the sunlight.

She happened to be wearing a dress again. A yellow one that complimented her complexion beautifully. It was a long-sleeved dress- to, likely, hide the scar on her forearm- but it still bared her shoulders and he *maybe*, not-so-secretly, enjoyed seeing her in it.

He watched as she kneeled down to play with them, however, that just gave the children a better vantage point to touch her skin and hair.

She giggled as a little girl named Lena began comparing their hands.

Armin grinned at the sound, then looked to the grassy expanse that stretched on for what seemed like leagues.

He breathed in the peaceful atmosphere.

After a month of constant travel and labor, he was *spent* and was glad to finally be back. Though- he was not as spent as he could be.

All that tedious manual labor would have been much more unbearable had Hermione not assisted.

And as a show of good faith for all her hard work, and for those couple days of blood loss induced bed rest- Squad Levi was allowed to escort her outside the base to the Orphanage.

Ever since he'd mentioned the Orphanage to her, and how many of the Scouts went there to work or spend their days off... she alluded to wanting to go as well.

Seeing how being cooped up in her room was mentally killing her, and then how straining to prove herself with the rebuilding was *actually* killing her led him to suggest this olive branch to Commander Erwin, and surprisingly, he agreed.

"She's beautiful, is she not," he looked down to find a smirking Historia.

He gave the question some thought, wanting to be careful with his words. It was undeniable to him, of course, but his answer could be damning depending on Hermione's true alliances.

And... well- sometimes, admitting your feelings could be... quite embarrassing.

"Mm," he slightly nodded, "but I'd think anyone would agree," he answered in a tone that was meant to end the conversation.

But Historia wasn't one to shy away from these sorts of things, "But you more so, correct?"

He blushed involuntarily, "M-maybe."

He looked back at Hermione. Despite their obvious intrusion of boundaries, she smiled at the kids, even chuckling at their antics.

"Guten Tag, ich bin Hermione- Oder kurz Mia," she placed a palm on her chest to make it easier for them to interpret her accented words.

A chorus of Guten tags and Hallo Mia's could be heard in response.

Armin smiled.

She began asking all the children their names and he could tell she had already committed them to memory.

"Oi! Brats. Stop staring and start working. We can't *all* be here for fun."

"Yes Captain," they hurriedly moved towards the hay that was to be brought to the stables.

"I don't know why you still refer to him as Captain, Historia. You are his queen after all."

She shrugged, "Habit, I guess- and respect."

"Well, the Captain obviously doesn't mind," he looked back at the Captain awkwardly patting a boy's head.

"Mm," Historia threw a bale on her shoulder, "You know, he has seemed to be in a good mood lately..."

"I think he's just relieved about the operation to retake Wall Maria... He probably assumed we'd see more casualties than we actually did," he bore a bale on each shoulder.

They began walking to the stables, closer to where Hermione sat with the orphans.

"And that's partly due to the witch, yes?"

He nodded, "Yes... Hermione was a huge help to us- of course, we can't be perfectly sure why."

"Well, for all our sakes- I hope she is on our side," she gave him a knowing look.

Oh, I know, I know. I like her- no need to be so sly about it.

He chose to ignore the look and kept his eyes on the path, "I hope so too..."

"Armin! Historia! Place them over here!"

"Just a moment, Sasha," they finally reached the end of the stables, setting down their hay in a pile adjacent to the wall.

"We won't need to do too much today, the locals and other Scouts have been doing a *great* job at maintaining the Orphanage," Jean clapped off some of the dirt from his hands.

"That's good. I just wanna take it easy today," Connie wiped some sweat off his forehead, "Who knew construction work was so hard?"

"Construction workers," everyone deadpanned.

"Huh," he furrowed his eyebrows, but then his eyes widened, "Oi, Sasha where do you think you're going."

She stopped dead in her tracks. Sasha puffed her cheeks, red-handed, "I was gonna ask Hermione for some candy."

"Awe, c'mon. You know she's not going to give you any anytime soon- not after you tried to steal some last time."

Armin agreed with Jean, "You know, she would've *happily* shared some more if you'd just asked."

Sasha pouted, "Not the whole stash though."

Armin shook his head fondly.

Historia chuckled, "Sasha tried stealing candy... from a witch...? Sounds bizarre, doesn't it?"

Armin smiled, thinking of the very witch of which she mentioned, "Well, everything's been a bit bizarre lately, hasn't it?"

Everyone vehemently agreed.

"Oh. Hey Mikasa, hey Eren- uh- is Mikasa carrying your sack of grains?" Connie greeted them.

Mikasa walked past them to drop the bags while Eren stopped to stand by Armin's side.

"Mm. She won't let me carry anything so that I can heal," he answered mechanically.

Normally, Eren would be furious to be treated this way... or at the very least, annoyed.

Either he's starting to appreciate Mikasa's coddling... or... he doesn't care...

"Uh- o-okay..."

Everyone could tell something was different with Eren, but no one could exactly pinpoint why... though, they *could* pinpoint the when.

The Medal Ceremony...

Something about kissing Historia's hand had changed him... but it didn't seem like anything romantic (and it's not like Historia would reciprocate)... it was something else...

There were whispers of it being Hermione's doing, but to Armin, that was absurd.

Even if they hadn't known the extent of Hermione's powers, the spell surely would've loosened its hold when she was bedridden. He knew for sure that the "old Eren" would have come back in a heartbeat.

Because he knew Eren- he would never stop fighting for his freedom, especially from within his own mind.

No- this was something entirely different, this was to do with Titan memories... it had to be. Seeing his father's memories took a toll on him, sure... but Armin suspected it was because of what he had seen when he had touched a person with royal blood.

But he couldn't be sure... especially with Eren's newfound skills at deflection... He was *definitely* hiding the answer from them...

Armin sighed.

He believed Eren would tell them eventually... he had to, they-

-wait... something was off.

"Where's Sasha?"

Jean groaned, "Hey Sasha! Come back here! We're not done yet!"

Poor Hermione.

They all ran out to collect Sasha when they heard Hermione shout.

They exited the stables to find Hermione being manhandled by Sasha, bear hugging her lifted form from behind.

"Oh, thank Merlin- go watch the kids! They're playing with a paper bird- Sasha! I think they'll be f-fi-" She giggled, "Sasha stop that- I'm ticklish. Sash-" she broke off the scold to end with a laugh.

As most of the others went to go check on the kids, Armin giggled at the sight before him. *She looks so good like this-* joyful and healthy, full of smiles- and he *loved* her smiles.

"I don't have any candy for you, Sasha!"

He could practically hear Mikasa's eye roll, "Just let her go, Sasha."

"Yes, thank you Mikasa," Hermione said defeatedly.

"No way, I need that candy," Sasha raved, shaking Hermione some more.

Deciding to be merciful, "Oh c'mon Sasha, let Hermione go," he grinned.

She stopped shaking Hermione to smirk, "Oh? So what? So you can hold her instead?"

Hermione balked.

He shrugged, unperturbed, "Maybe- but we won't know until you let her go."

Her eyes darkened comically, "Are you challenging me, Arlert?"

He mimicked her, "Maybe, Braus," he replied in a low tone.

"Okay, okay. No. We are not doing this."

"Are you sure you want to take this route, Braus?"

Hermione looked equal parts amused and horrified- *what a combination*, "Not you too, Mikasa!"

"Let the lazy ass go, Sasha."

He knew it was coming before it happened.

After Hermione had healed from her stress-induced injury, she had taken to teasing Captain Levi nonstop about his care for her.

She was *relentless* and he admired her bravery.

As she was dropped to her feet she exclaimed, "Oh thank you, Uncle Levi!"

Armin flinched, still unused to the amount of casualness directed at the Captain by someone that was not his senior.

Mikasa smirked, overjoyed with Hermione's treatment towards Captain Levi.

"Tch, useless brat," he turned away to escape the demon that was Hermione's affection.

Hermione only proudly strode behind Mikasa and Armin, her short stature dwarfed by their taller forms. She stayed a step behind them as she linked an arm through each of theirs.

He craned his neck to watch as she brought two fingers from her arm linked with Mikasa's to her eyes then pointed them at Sasha, gesturing that she was "keeping an eye on her".

Cute.

"Let's go back to the kids. That paper bird can't hold them for much longer- at least I don't think it will..."

"Hermione!" Sasha whined.

"If you're a good girl," she called out behind her, the three of them already on their way to the children.

They stopped a while away to watch as Connie, Eren, and Jean tried to entertain the children... to no avail. Well- he had to give Connie credit... he was doing much better with them than Eren and Jean.

"Hallo Mia!" A boy named Lutz ran towards them.

"Hallo, Lutz."

"Can you make another bird, Mia? Can you make a hundred? Oh please, please, please, please, please," they squealed excitedly.

She gave Lutz a smile while she thought.

"I can do you one better," she left their linked arms to beckon the children towards them.

She brought a finger over her smiling lips in an effort to calm them down. "This is something very special to me. Do you want to see?"

Special?

A chorus of enthusiastic "JA's!" spread across the crowd.

"Alright, watch *very* carefully," she closed her eyes and held her wand close to her chest. She pointed the wand in the air and spoke a spell in a language she called "Latin".

It sounded snappy, but with the soft way she said it- *okay Armin, enough with the reverence.*

He watched, awed, as a wispy dog-like creature appeared from her wand.

Now *this* was magic.

It danced around their heads, flipping and floating, weaving through the crowd. The kids ran to try and chase it, jumping and rolling with the creature in joy.

They were suddenly dog piled by a number of children when the creature came to dance around his head instead.

He laughed as it went to muzzle his cheek and was surprised to find that he could actually feel the push of the creature's face against his.

He looked on as it hopped on Hermione's shoulders to wrap around her neck. He looked down at Hermione, his grin was impossibly wide.

Her eyes were lit in the same way they were when she described Shakespeare or her favorite book or her latest idea- they were warm

and lively and to see it on her as she performed magic was almost magical in itself.

Because this was the first time he had seen her so *happy* about using magic, and she truly wore the look well.

He forced himself to shift his attention back to her creation, the source of such a momentous feat. He watched as it almost... *swam* towards Mikasa, moving quite fluidly despite being in the air.

Mikasa gracefully allowed the creature to rest on her shoulders before it ventured off to lead the children in another chase.

"Magic meat?!"

He turned to watch as Sasha ran towards the creature.

"Sasha, no!"

It would be another hour before they would have all the work finished- longer than anticipated with all the hysterics distracting them from getting their jobs done.

And with all those frenzied antics to occupy him, he had never gotten the time to ask Hermione about the spell.

It was only later, when Hermione had asked to join him on his last task, that they had finally gotten to discuss what had happened earlier that day.

When Armin finished she pulled him into her arms, cheek pressed against his chest, "What did you think, Meer?"

She had taken to calling him the sea in Eldian, an appropriate nickname if anything. Though, she did seem to keep the name to themselves- which he didn't mind.

In return, he had taken to calling her Mond- though he liked to call her Mondlein in secret. She always asked why he called her the

moon, but he could never articulate exactly why when asked.

I'd probably scare her away if I did...

"I thought it was wonderful, Mond. Truly wonderful," he held the cheek not pressed against his chest. "What was it exactly?"

"A manifestation of my happiness- in the form of an otter of course."

Of course it was- no wonder she looked as happy as she did.

"An ah-tah?"

She giggled into his chest, "Think... "water weasel"."

"I see... it did seem to splash around somehow..."

"Yes, my Patronus is very ingenuitive." She ran her hands up and down his back distractingly.

"Y-you call it a... pah- tro- nus?"

"Mm, a Patronus usually wards off these beings called dementors- which are basically soul-sucking, sadness demons- if that makes sense?" She didn't seem to be aware of the movement of her hands- lost in assuring the accuracy of her response.

"S-sure," he played with the ends of her curls, equally lost in the illusion of their union.

"Well, the spell calls forth a Patronus that changes depending on personality. Mine is an otter, my friend's is a s-sta-" she broke off into a half giggle, half squeal as he unknowingly brushed against the side of her waist.

Oh?

He smirked down at her, "That reminds me..." He tightened the hold on her hips, "You mentioned being... ticklish?"

Hermione pulled away to look at his face, "appalled". She fake gasped, "Now, where did you hear such a thing." She shook her head, "No, no of course not."

"Are you sure? So you wouldn't mind if I ran a test of my own? Just to be sure?" He ghosted his fingers over her waist.

"I-" She tried to stifle the giggle that escaped her throat, "I think you'd find the endeavor quite fruitless," she couldn't help but let her sentence devolve into laughter.

He tickled her further, "Yeah?"

She held him tighter- a poor attempt at protecting herself from his tickling assault, "Y-ye-" she laughed into his sternal notch.

He enjoyed the way her voice vibrated against the base of his neck, the way her hands fisted the back of his shirt, and the way her curls would brush against the hands on her waist and the bottom of his chin.

"A-Armin!"

He blushed at the way she gasped his name- it seemed very reminiscent of a different kind of gasp- a gasp he'd tried not to think about in the middle of the night.

"Sa-Sasha was right-" she tried catching her breath, and he could feel her every curve flushed against him.

"You just wanted to get your grubby little paws on me," she grinned knowingly.

Armin brought his hand to play with the curls near her neck, "Such accusations..."

He let the hand rest on her cheek, "They're right of course."

Hermione raised a playful brow, "Oh?"

He stared at the way her full lips rounded to make the sound.

"Mm."

He leaned down in a moment of weakness, "May I-"

"Armin!"

They jumped at the call and reluctantly pulled away from each other.

"Are you in there? Yeah, Captain needs you to see something before we leave."

Sure he does...

And though her hands lingered on his form, she looked away,
"Maybe another time..."

His hands fell to his side, "Yeah... maybe..."

But he knew they would scarcely find another time like this- a time where *both* of them could forget that she was technically still their "internee", that, inevitably, she would be going back home...

And that an actual relationship would negatively impact Hermione's ability to be trusted- something she needed in order to return to her world...

Armin sighed internally as he gave Hermione a sincere farewell which she returned before he left to meet Captain Levi.

As of now, they still had plausible deniability, but if anything happened... neither of them would be able to hide that from their friends... and they, in turn, could not hide that from their superiors...

How frustrating...

To most, they were just abnormally close... as the general population of Scouts knew Armin for being dutiful and responsible, and they

couldn't possibly fathom the idea that he would let his *feelings* obstruct any decision concerning the lives of his friends.

He looked back at Hermione, only to see her jogging towards him.

And just as he was about to tell her off for running- *she's supposed to be taking it easy* -

"Armin-" She pulled him down by his collar and kissed the corner of his lips, "Thank you for bringing me here."

She smiled at him with an appreciation seldom given to him in this particular way- one he knew he'd cherish forever.

He felt his cheeks scald and he just *knew* they were bright red. But before she could pull away, he looked into her eyes and held one of her hands to his chest, "It was my pleasure, Mond, truly."

He turned back around, willing his heart to slow and for his face to pale.

Armin sighed.

He had asked himself this so many times- were his feelings getting in the way?

They might be.

He cleared his throat in an attempt to hide his affection and had a feeling he was biting off way more than he could chew.

He had finally gotten time to leave for the Stohess District, though, he was still sorry to leave Hermione alone for a day or two to do it.

But he couldn't change that now. No, this was something that he needed to do, and he needed to do it alone.

He greeted Hitch on his way in, a simple nod in their direction.

They had already gone through that ritual a couple times before, more out of curiosity than anything else- curiosity not only for the girl he liked but for the material she had now been entrapped in.

He sighed as he stood in the middle of the cold chamber holding her frozen body.

He'd visited with Hange and a few other Military scientists to crack the code of Annie's hardening skin.

But now, after seeing her in Berthold's memories, he just wanted to talk.

"Hello, Annie."

No answer... as expected.

"I guess I came here alone today to... to just talk to you- with you?" He sighed, "Just- there'll be no experiments today, only listening," Armin examined Annie through the crystal. Was *she listening*?

Was her mind awake in that thing? And did it truly matter at this point?

Maybe not, but I'm here so...

He scrutinized her face through the hardening material. She was the same as always, never changing when out here, everything had.

"A lot has happened since I've last been. A lot..." he looked to the side in shame. He took a long pause to finalize his thoughts.

"I- one of your comrades- Berthold," he choked out the name, the guilt and shame of eating him alive collecting all in his throat.

"Berthold's gone... He's gone because of me. I just thought I should let you know."

He shut his eyes tight, "I'm sorry."

He opened his eyes to stare at the ceiling, "... at least Reiner got away... He's probably deep within Marley by now..."

He let the moment linger.

"Marley must have been the worst, Annie- to live under such conditions..."

He looked back at her, "It must've been hell, truly."

"But I can't say which hell was worse- your's or our's... I guess it'd be foolish to try and compare."

"But the Warrior training? The help from your father? I understand why you were so good now," he chuckled despondently.

"I think I understand you a bit better, Annie... finally, I do."

He sighed. *I hope I do.*

He brought his head back, "So much has changed. Everything seems different- everything *is* different... but it's always been this way, hasn't it Annie? And you knew, you always knew."

She knew about Marley and the world outside the walls, and almost every other bombshell dropped on them these past few months.

And yet, he wouldn't be surprised if Annie knew about this too.

He chuckled, thinking of one of the most glaring corroborations to her story- the fact that neither Armin nor Eren had found any evidence of witches outside the walls.

"There's also this girl... she claims to be from another world- crazy, isn't it?"

He waited a beat but felt crazy, himself, at the action.

"... but I believe her, I really do," he played with his hands to relieve some of his nervous energy.

"And I don't know if that's the infatuation talking or my intuition..."

"But with you... I-"

He sighed.

"It was easier... *why was it easier?*"

He remembered the way he manipulated her feelings for him that day... he remembered telling her he wouldn't think she was a good person if she didn't help them...

I could separate my feelings from my duty then...

So why can't I do that now?

"And you liked me too. Didn't you, Annie?" He looked up at her sleeping face.

He remembered the way she left him alive on that field, the way she followed him to "help Eren escape" even though she *knew* he was lying.

"Well, she likes me too..."

Then what's so different? Why is it that my feelings have been obstructing me from my duty?

"I am... unbelievably confused," he chuckled to himself in an almost self-deprecating way, "That doesn't seem very like me, does it?"

When he was, again, met with no answer he sighed, "I suppose not."

...

"It's true... it's true that she hasn't given us much to suspect her on. She's done nothing but be... kind of perfect. But that's the thing... she's *too* perfect."

He closed his eyes, "She's kind, *incredibly* intelligent, works herself to death for us... literally," he said that last part bitterly.

"Sh-she's beautiful too," he blushed.

His eyes widened, "N-not that you aren't... also beautiful... because you are..."

Merlin, what am I doing?

Wait-

Ugh, I've even picked up her speech patterns...

He let his face fall in his hands, "It's just- she's so headstrong and brave and I can see she has hope for the world- hope that it could become better. Maybe she's seen it happen, maybe she's an idealist like me..."

"But it's not all been butterflies and rainbows. There's so much we haven't told her- and I know she knows we haven't. She really could get the information anytime she wants... but she seems to want us to trust her. It's suspicious but also... very... innocent somehow."

"Naive maybe? She's definitely been through something traumatic but it seems she's still retained so much... hope..."

He sighed into his hands.

"It's not all lies, I know that for sure. But where does the lie start? *Is* there a lie? How could there not be..."

"Because how did she just fall into our laps in the nick of time? Why did this seemingly perfect being just- with all her altruism and

kindness and charm- why did she just join us when we needed her most...?"

He shook his head, "She's said her reasons, which are plausible, but it can't be just that. There has to be more- there has to be, because if there isn't... I don't think I can let her go so easily..."

In all reality, I'd be heartbroken if she went back to her homeworld.

"And honestly, I don't know how I'd react if she *were* to actually betray us... This- It would be devastating."

Not only for their progress as Eldians within the wall but for him personally as well...

She makes me feel so worthy- worthy to exist... I've felt it before but never in a way that wasn't tainted by Titans and killing and war .

The simple act of holding her- reassuring her made him feel like maybe he was useful for more than just strategy in the name of violence.

Hermione made him feel whole.

He combed through the hair free from his ponytail nervously, "But enough about her- must not be what you want to hear about, eh?"

"Maybe you'd like to hear more about me," he laughed in a rather self-deprecating manner. He then sobered a bit, "I don't know, maybe you would..."

He tried to forgo his insecurities in favor of reason, thinking of all the moments that made him sure that Annie would join them in Stohess.

"Maybe..." he shook his head, snapping himself out of his speculation, "Well..."

"Well... I... I've been thinking about what it means to be good, what I prescribe as good, and what it means to me now- now that

everything's changed. And it frustrates me and frightens me and amazes me to no end that whenever I think of "good", Hermione comes to mind..."

"I- I still believe no one is truly good or bad- not universally- not to everyone," he wrung his fingers nervously, "It's subjective, yes?" He looked up at Annie's ever stoic face. And although he wasn't expecting an answer, he figured if she could hear, then he might as well speak to her like she was human and not some journal to lay out his thoughts.

"Well. Then subjectively, to me, Hermione is good," he couldn't help the small smile that made its way to his lips. Emboldened by memories of her character- of their time together he kept on, "She *is* a good person. She just is. It's like she makes any good deed I or anyone else has ever done pale in comparison to her's. Her kindness isn't done out of an obligation to some moral code or system of power, but because she genuinely cares for the people she's helping. Her powers aren't inherently destructive like our's, they're beautiful and useful for more than just... killing and war."

"When I help her, when I take care of her-" he ran his hand through his hair, untying it in the process, "it's just- I've never felt so *good* . I've never felt such pureness in my worth. I've only felt this way once and that was..." His eyes wandered into an empty space on the ground. He remembered when he'd realized that he'd inadvertently saved his best friends by calling on Hannes on that fateful day. He remembered the feeling of pride and worthiness to be by their side. "Anyways..." he shook himself out of his thoughts once again, "She makes me feel like I can be good too."

He thought about the woman he murdered to save Jean, all the unfortunate Eldians from Marley he directly and indirectly killed by being in the Scouts, all the times he'd saved his friends because of an intelligence and strategic mind that was only useful in times of great conflict.

Then he thought of all the ways he helped Hermione. How he'd keep her company, remind her when to rest and eat, and how he'd hold her when she sad. There was no bitter aftertaste to helping Hermione, certainly not that of bloodshed either. To him, it felt pure, she made him feel pure.

"Ugh, sorry, talking about her again," he scratched the back of his head and blushed, embarrassed by his seemingly endless praise of this otherworldly girl.

He put on a false smile, "It seems that Captain Levi's been in a good mood lately-"

Armin stayed there for quite a while, up until he was practically kicked out by Hitch.

Does she like Annie too?

No matter, it can't be helped. It was undeniable that Annie had a certain charm to her, even as she was encased in hardening crystal.

Can't blame Hitch if she did.

It was certainly an enlightening time- despite Armin being the only one talking. It allowed him to organize his thoughts better, lay them out more logically.

I'll visit again soon and I'll probably have more to talk about by then too.

He sighed once more as he rode his horse back to their base. He couldn't help but anticipate seeing Hermione again, his Mond. He couldn't help but worry either.

Oh, she's probably fine- the squad's probably keeping her company in my stead.

She's probably just fine, he sighed. He softly smiled when he saw that it was late enough in the day for the stars to show... his world's

stars...

Maybe Hermione was right. Maybe I can come to her world one day...

Wishful thinking, Armin, wishful thinking.

For now, just get back to the base... then get to the Sea.

Get to the Sea with-

He shook his head. *Wishful thinking, Armin...*

Wishful thinking...

Author's Note:

If their relationship seems to be going too fast in a bad way please let me know! **To clarify, Hermione has been in Paradis for THREE months now.**

Translations:

Hallo: Hello

Guten Tag: Hello/Good Day/Good Morning/etc.

Ich bin Hermione- Oder kurz Mia: I am Hermione- Mia for short.

Ja: Yes

You can start requesting Armione one shots for me to do, I've already posted three as you can see from where the fic info

I have the Tumblr (where I will and do post additional info, one-shots, and memes for this fic) and my Pinterest board for Hermione linked in bio:)

Once again, thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! Normally, if you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

I also don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 12

Author's Note: One Eldian/German translation at the Ending Author's Note... Also, forgive me, for taking so long *and* for this kinda being cringe- super corny in fact, but it *surprisingly* moves the plot along quite nicely... okay- yeah, I just wanted an excuse for them to get naked together lmaooo

But damn, full warning, I do NOT know how to "tone down" smut full "uncensored" AU version will be on my Tumblr at a later time and is currently on my archive acc

Song used is Remember the Time by MJ

Chapter 12

"What are you hiding, Granger?" Floch said, narrowing his eyes as Hermione subconsciously leaned back in her seat.

He had caught her so off guard, swiftly walking to their table and questioning her without a second's hesitation.

He was obviously drunk so she tried not to take it personally... and it so happened that he wasn't the *only* one to harbor such feelings- in fact, the feeling was quite common.

And to some degree... she couldn't exactly blame them.

So in response, she attempted to compose herself and tried to come up with an answer that didn't *completely* strip her of her dignity. Unfortunately, she just couldn't muster up the words.

"I- uh- well..."

"Stop that, Floch," Armin steely interrupted.

"You might be bringing back *bad memories*," he not so subtly whispered. Though... she couldn't find it in her to be mad at him. He was a bit tipsy after all.

Floch's eyes flickered to Armin in faint acknowledgment before steely landing on Hermione once again.

"I'd just like to know why she's so against it. Hmm," he tapped a mocking finger on his chin, "Could it be that she's *afraid* of something? Afraid of slipping up- of... *saying the wrong thing*," he raised an accusatory brow.

From her peripheral vision, she could see Mikasa stiffen in her seat, and even Eren was a bit on edge.

"So what is it, witch? What's your big secret?" He slightly slurred.

"Floch!" Armin abruptly stood up, slamming his hand on the table while Connie, Jean, and Sasha echoed similar verbal sentiments.

"I-"

She stilled, glancing around. She found that the entire surrounding area had gone quiet, waiting for her response. She brought her forehead down to the table with an arm wrapped around the crown of her head.

She burrowed deeper into her arm-made fence to hide the embarrassment that was so clearly written on her face.

Ever since she'd first had dinner with the Scouts- all of them- she had been scrutinized for every little thing.

Most especially? Her rejection of alcohol.

But it just couldn't be helped- she was far too embarrassing when drunk, excruciatingly so.

But her ability to go home was on the line- she would need their collective trust, or else any favorable decision made towards her would be met with *justifiable* outrage.

Merlin's fucking beard, she lamented, knowing what she had to do.

It had been a good run, three months of resistance was pretty good for an outsider. Though, Armin and the rest of her friend's support was a huge help as well.

She sighed into her arm. It was true- she'd been stalling for far too long. Trying to prolong the feeling of embarrassment she'd inevitably feel afterward. She sighed once again, she was really going to have to sacrifice her pride for this.

Merlin, do I have to?

She reached an arm out and placed it on the table, open-palmed and defeated. She still didn't look up but she replied, "Just give me the damn ale and you'll get what you've been asking for..." she hesitated, "Just don't fucking speak of this shit-" she brought her head up and eyed everyone around her, "ever again."

"Woah, Hermione cursed. That's new."

Very much not so, Connie.

"Y-you don't have to, Hermione. Floch's just being an asshole," Armin reassured.

She stared up at him, "No- I should. Just to clear up this whole mess. I know people are still suspicious of me... and this... this will probably put an end to that."

He placed his palm over her open one- without hesitation- the ale making him bold, "If you say so," Ocean eyes stared back at her through hooded lids. *Thank Merlin* her blush was hidden by her dark brown skin.

As the night dragged on (and as she grew deeper into her cups) she began to sway to a song in her head.

Do you remember the time?

When we fell in love?

She hummed, eyes closed, rolling her hips on the bench.

Do you remember the time? When we first met, girl?

She caressed her neck, imagining it was a... *certain someone else's* instead. She brushed her hair back, exposing her neck to the world, and she could feel small beads of sweat as her hands made a pass.

You know what? It is getting kind of hot in here... She thought as she began lifting her sweater to pull over her head.

So detached from reality, she couldn't hear the nervous objections and pleading requests for her to put the sweater back on.

So inside her own head she couldn't realize that *the purple scar given to her by Dolohov was now visible above her top's neckline*, nor the previously revealed scars on her arm and neck.

Left in just a tank top with no bra, she just caressed her body in accordance with the song.

In her blissful ignorance, all she could do was roll her head in imagined ecstasy.

Feeling frustrated that she could only repeat the chorus over and over again, she *Acciod* her Discman and played the song, uncaring of who would hear- or who would watch.

I don't know, bet you wanna try

Every time you see

She stood, almost swayed, from the bench-

"No."

Mikasa pulled her down while simultaneously stuffing Hermione back in her sweater.

Hermione spluttered, confused by Mikasa's actions. "M-Mikasa, wha-"

"No," she shook her head.

"But Mikasa-"

"-Mm mm," Mikasa shook her head in a firm stance of opposition.

Hermione, in a drunken state, began to fret.

"You can't do this to me," Hermione shook the arm she was latched onto, "You can't take this away from me!"

"Her-"

"I shan't have my liberties impeded on- infringed! I am a free witch! I shall dance wherever and whenever I please!" She jumped up from the bench and skipped down the row of benches.

Do you remember, back in the fall?

We'd be together all day long

She danced with no mental restrictions, no restraints, and no logical regulation.

She could faintly hear what sounded like cheers and whoops as she swayed her hips to the song.

Eyes heavy, Hermione teased her hands up the sides of her thighs, to the curves of her breasts, up her neck to eventually hold her hair

up and away from her neck.

In each other's eyes, we'd stare

She let out a yelp as she felt someone grab her by the waist. And with a surprising amount of force, she felt them drag her towards the door.

"Time for bed, Mond," a voice she'd recognized as Armin's whispered in her ear.

"But Me- Armin!" She held onto him tightly in an attempt to make them stay.

"What about the dancing?" She pouted, genuinely distressed at the thought of not being able to continue.

She watched as the flush from the alcohol darkened on his cheeks, but he just began playing with her hair in an attempt to soothe her, "We can dance in your room, come on."

She held her stance and her eyebrow lifted in suspicion, "Are you sure?"

He sighed fondly, "Very, Mond. Come now, I think we've both had enough to drink tonight."

Merlin, am I really drunk? How did I allow myself to get so damn smashed? "Have we really?" She asked in candor.

He chuckled, "Yes, really," he gently pinched her cheek, "And I think you've managed to thoroughly convince them of your innocence... as well as leave them completely stunned-"

Despite herself, she giggled, "-stunned-"

"-so leaving is quite manageable and highly advised-"

She temporarily sobered.

"-Wait," he stopped squishing her cheek, "I need to bring my Discman. We'll need music when we dance, won't we?"

He was already halfway to their table before she could even finish her sentence, "Of course," he quickly grabbed her Discman then tugged her towards the door, "C'mon, let's hurry."

Hermione giggled at the urgency in his voice and tugged at his arm to follow hers in return.

And as they rushed past the other inhabitants of the mess hall, she didn't catch him send Floch and any others in their way a warning glare. Though, he did make a show of taking her back to her quarters for more "dignified", "official" reasons such as "keeping the peace" and *"detaining a wild hostage"*.

Their rushed walking turned into running as they made it to the corridors of the base. It was sloppy, sure- but nonetheless thrilling.

As they made it closer to her room, their wide smiles became hushed laughs and their attraction towards one another was made glaringly, unavoidably apparent.

They were left breathless, grinning as she closed the door behind them. The room was silent except for the occasional chuckle in between breaths, Hermione aimed to remedy that problem.

Turning on some music, Jazz, not only in an attempt to leave them calm, but to see the satisfied look on Armin's face.

As Louis' signature sound played, she danced her way over to him, swaying with each trill of the trumpet.

When she reached him, she asked for permission with her eyes- which he granted with a soft nod and a gentle smile.

She slid one palm up his arm to rest around his shoulder while the other hand met his in a hold. And her cheek rested on his chest as

she felt him sigh against her.

He put a hand around her waist in response, and let his cheek rest in her curls. It was reminiscent, yet more intimate than the way they'd held each other when they'd first tried slow dancing.

They rocked into each other, hands tightening and heads nuzzling in an attempt to become impossibly closer.

Usually, only Armin would be tipsy- sometimes drunk- but with a sober Hermione to be his logical guide, nothing foolish nor foolhardy occurred between them.

Now that barrier was gone, and neither of the two had enough wits combined to say no to any of their desires.

Hermione was entranced. She never knew she could feel so content- so at ease- so right with something in her life.

If sober Hermione were to see herself, she'd probably give herself a *good, stern* talking to- but because she wasn't- drunk Hermione was left to bask in the warmth of his body and the tenderness of his hold.

"You're much better at this type of dancing," she remarked breathily.

He pulled her closer in an attempt to hide his bashful look, "It's probably because it's easier," he mumbled into her thick curls.

"I mean... I suppose so," she spoke softly but lifted her head off his chest to look him in the eyes. "But I just think you're quite good- yes, very good indeed."

She knew people who couldn't even find their rhythm to a slow dance- who would step on the feet of their partners but could fly with the grace of a bird. So to her, he truly was good at the dancing, and besides- she was not at the liberty of being able to lie at the moment anyways.

"Thank you, Mondlein," he rasped softly. She felt her heart stutter and her face warm as they held each other's gaze. She burrowed her face into his chest to ease the symptoms of her yearning.

Mondlein? Moon... something?

That was new. Though, she could recall him saying that weeks ago- when she was bedridden...

The suffix was familiar though- used in the common word Fr ä ulein- it's meaning however...

She'd ask about it later... preferably when she was sober.

"It's the truth, Meer," she mumbled into the base of his neck.

They stayed that way for a while, letting the music wash over them, letting the time pass them by.

Finally, there came a time when she was left so sleepy from all the drinking and dancing that she began to go limp against him- her weight on his chest becoming a telltale sign of her exhaustion.

She could practically hear the smile in his tut.

"Come, my dear. I think It's finally time you go to bed," he ran his hands up and down her arms to wake her enough to head to bed.

She leaned into him further, his words barely registering in her mind. The result of her alcohol-induced daze being a brain uninhibited by logic, "Stay."

She took a deep breath to compose herself, "Stay with me- for the night."

Armin ran his fingers over her curls, the intrigue quite obvious in his voice, "... What... What do you mean?"

"Stay with me. Sleep with me er- I mean *bei mir schlafen*," she reassured.

He inhaled a sharp breath, but his fingers never stopped their soothing caress, "Are you sure?"

She may not have been the most reliable source, but she could swear his voice became a bit coarser.

She nodded against him, "Yes. Yes, of course."

He thought for a moment, his movements sluggish as he moved towards her bedroom, "Then let's go-"

She held him in place, with whatever strength she had left, "-We should put on our night clothes before we go."

His brows raised in surprise, "... If you want to change- I'll stay here while you-"

"No, it's okay. Here's fine," and she began pulling off her sweater.

"H-Hermione..." he trailed off.

"Hm?" She said, already out of her sweater and working on her pants.

"N-nothing."

Cheeks still tinted, he looked down at her as he began unbuckling his belt.

She watched through hooded lids as he distractedly unbuttoned his shirt, Ocean eyes watching as she neatly discarded her sweater and jeans.

Left in her tank top and knickers, with him just in his briefs- Hermione's heart raced and suddenly, she felt awake.

She knew- being that he was a military man- that he would be fit to some extent, but she was taken aback by just how *toned* he actually was.

I should've done this months ago...

She immediately slid her hands down his shoulders and over the muscles of his upper arms. In return he placed a firm hold on her bare waist, enjoying the way the flesh molded around his fingers.

"What happened to putting on our night clothes?" He whispered in her ear.

"For some, these are their nightclothes. And besides- we don't have to, do we?"

In an almost hyper-fixated trance, she let her forehead fall against his chest as she traced a finger down the muscles of his abdomen to play with the hem of his briefs.

Oh my-!

Suddenly, she flinched away from his form, the realization of her nonconsensual touches dawning on her.

Embarrassed, she hid behind her hair, "Merlin, I'm so sorry- I should've asked- I-"

He stepped into her, bodies now flush against each other and she could feel the proof of his excitement press against her.

"-It's okay, Mondlein," he brushed the hair back from her face to fully see her. "I- I liked it," he flushed pink despite the hungry look in his eyes.

There goes that name again...

"Still, I should've asked," she shook her head bashfully, faintly aware of how the alcohol was still affecting her actions.

"Then I should've asked too..." he let his hands slide gently off her frame. She couldn't help but mourn over the loss of his touch.

"Do you want to stop then?"

She shook her head again, blood rushing to her cheeks, "Not particularly. No," she mumbled shyly.

"Then we won't..." he took her left hand with both of his, letting his fingers climb up her scarred arm in reverence.

He caressed the skin, neither hiding from it nor disgusted by it, and she felt herself fall for him even deeper.

Her breath quickened as he brought her arm to his lips to kiss each letter before placing it gently to her side.

"You're perfect," he whispered, looking into her eyes as if he was willing her to believe him... as if he were willing her to believe those words as well.

Her breath hitched. *He doesn't actually believe that, does he? I'm-I'm far from perfect. Everyone is...*

And yet, she still couldn't stop the stutter in her heart and the heat that bubbled in her chest.

Armin then placed his hands on her waist, giving her a soft look of appraisal before sliding one hand up to stop right below the skin of her breast. She shuddered as his thumb rubbed slow circles into the skin.

"I really don't think we should be doing this," he whispered under his breath, yet he continued to let his hands wander all over her body.

"Mm," she acknowledged but was far too entranced by his touches to fully agree.

Instead, she entwined their hands, calmly leading him to her bed.

On their sides, lightly clad, and legs entangled, they nuzzled into each other lazily- adjusting till they found the most comfortable position.

They both sighed. Melting into one another, finding solace in each other's touch.

Hermione breathed in his scent until she felt her head become heavy with the weight of all of her indecent fantasies. She wished she could articulate them all, but found that expressing a much tamer desire would be much more attainable.

"I wish I could kiss you Goodnight," she said in hushed tones.

He stilled, then relaxed into their embrace.

"You can... you can if you want," he encouraged, subconsciously using their combined abandon to his advantage.

She sighed in frustration, brows furrowed, "But that would make things more complicated..."

He lifted his head to kiss the lines of worry off her face, then began soothingly stroking her curls away from her face.

"... It would..." he said truthfully, though one could tell- he couldn't care if he tried.

Compelled by his laxity, she ran her fingers through his hair. "I still want to, you know," she murmured.

"I still..." She tenderly brought their foreheads together, their lips just a hair's breadth apart.

"Should we, mein Meer? Should we do it?" She brushed the loose hair away from his cheek, "Would that be okay?"

Armin feathered his hands up and down her spine, fingers lingering on the small of her back, "More than okay," he whispered.

Inching ever closer, their lips brushed against each other's in hesitation.

Hermione swooned, and Hermione had *never* swooned- or at least, not like this.

The kiss was shy, filled with all the warmth and care they'd grown and yet suppressed over the past few months.

It was drunken, a kiss interrupted by hushed giggles and whispered nothings.

It was a seemingly endless kiss, deeper than the Mariana and clearer than the Aegean Sea.

It was soft and it was tender, but that would all shift soon...

In the innocent attempt to be as close to him as possible, Hermione's hands slid down his chest to wrap around his waist. But her actions left a much more *sinful* impression on Armin's body and mind.

Armin deepened their kiss- almost desperately- and Hermione could feel her core thrum in response.

Unable to resist temptation, she ghosted her hands down the firm muscles of his back, tracing every dip and curve along the way. Fortunately for her, Armin quickly caught along, eagerly learning her body, walking his fingers down her spine till they heavily laid *just* above her arse.

Hermione sought to relieve the growing ache he'd been responsible for creating and instinctively began grinding into him at an excruciating pace.

His excitement was made clear to her then, a growing stiffness answering to the pace of her hips.

She heard Armin whimper into her mouth and felt his hips lightly match the pace of her own. And not long after, he pulled her tighter

and she felt his smile grow into their kiss.

Hm?

She was caught by surprise, breath hitching as Armin moved away from her lips to kiss down her jaw and nip at the delicate skin of her neck.

Hermione shuddered at the overstimulation, dragging her blunt nails down his chest to release some of the pent-up tension created from his ministrations.

He immediately stopped, letting out a shaky breath into the crook of her neck. "We- Do-"

She shivered as he huffed into her neck one more time.

"Should we continue?"

Hermione understood exactly what he meant and she licked her lips at the thought.

Ultimately and unfortunately, she decided against it. That would be the point of no return- and she didn't think she was quite ready for that now anyway.

She shook her head, "No, no- we should just go to sleep- like I promised."

He tried not to look disappointed but she could see it in his stormy eyes. She couldn't blame him though- she was disappointed too.

"Okay, Mondlein," he gave her a peck on the lips but she couldn't resist the invitation and let the kiss linger a bit longer.

Their affections culminated in lazy, bruising kisses and soft sighs of pleasure. That was- until he parted from her lips to fall on his back right next to her.

Her eyes darted towards him and she noticed a certain something tent within his briefs.

Hermione giggled into the back of her hand- feeling high off the alcohol and snogging.

She turned her head to face him, her smile wide, "Will you be okay," she glanced at his hardness to provide context.

He coughed, looking away to hide the embarrassment on his face. Though, he didn't bother covering his bulge.

"U-um yes, it's okay. I should be fine soon," he mumbled.

She curled up into his side, "Are you sure?"

He didn't answer for a while, "No, actually."

"I would help you with that, but I'm not sure we're there yet," she bit her lip nervously.

He rolled his head so his face was flush against her cloud of curls. "I understand. I wouldn't ask that of you anyway," he entwined their hands, "Let's just go to sleep together- as promised."

"Mm... as promised," she nodded sleepily in agreement.

She gave his hand a soft squeeze, "Gute nacht, mein Meer."

He squeezed her hand back, "Good night, my Moon," and the sound of Jazz washed over them as they fell asleep.

Author's Note:

Lmao plssss, just imagine everyone in various modes of shock, too dumbstruck to stop Hermione from stripping until Mikasa breaks the trance. POC Solidarity looool

Again, the smut version of this chapter is on my archive acc by the same author name.

You can also start requesting Armione one shots for me to do, I've already posted some that you can read on my tumblr (link in bio) and my archive acc.

If their relationship seems to be going too fast in a bad way please let me know! **To clarify, Hermione has been in Paradis for THREE months now.**

Translations:

bei mir schlafen: "sleep with me" in an actual sleep context not sexual

I also don't want to seem pushy, but I really love reading comments and reviews, so if you have the chance to do so, I'd love to see them.

To the Guest who left a comment on Chap 13: Thank you so much for the praise:) I hope I can continue to deserve such comments!

Once again, thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! Normally, if you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 13

Chapter 13

It wasn't to say that Armin and Hermione *weren't* aware of what had happened last week. In fact, Hermione and Armin were *very much* aware of the... *indulgences* that occurred the week prior.

If the teasing, whispers, and suggestive looks were anything to go by, it seemed his drunken assurance of formality and propriety did absolutely nothing for his fellow Scouts.

It was just that, through either sheer willpower or genuine closeness (and despite the awkward morning after) they'd managed not to let it change their dynamic too much.

The same could not be said for what had transpired later that week...

He sighed, eyes closed as he soaked in the last bits of sun from the sky.

They both had the day off- no work required whatsoever. And they chose to spend it at the Orphanage as it could be the most relaxing place within the walls at times.

But despite it being relaxing, it was still quite a bit of work, so after a long day of chasing kids and picking miscellaneous items out of Hermione's hair (*and an even longer week in general*)- laying next to Hermione on that soft bed of grass felt like bliss.

He smiled as he felt Hermione burrow deeper into the grass with a sigh.

Armin was *particularly* grateful for this day with just the two of them.

Ever since her "stunt" a week ago, his Commanding Officers had finally begun to believe that she had nothing menacing to hide.

How *that* seemed to be the final nail in the coffin proving Hermione's true allegiances- he wasn't sure, but it worked out well enough.

But on the days following her brazen, drunken act, Hermione was in the constant company of not only Armin, but of the Commander, Section Commander, and Captain as well- making it hard for them to discuss where exactly they stood in their previously all-platonic relationship.

He glanced to the side to see her, eyes closed in comfort as a languid smile played at her lips. He looked back up at the darkening sky.

Many of the obstacles that had previously been keeping them from pursuing any type of romantic relationship were now gone. That had, then, left them the option to actually begin something- though not very publicly. It was, at first, a rocky guessing game of where they stood.

Nonetheless, the days after were relatively easy-going. The awkwardness had faded and the blushing, teasing, and intellectual back and forth continued as per usual.

Armin nervously played with the grass beneath his fingers.

It was *what* Hermione had learned in those formal Scout briefings that had begun to strain their easy-going relationship. Though, retrospectively, it might've been more of his fault than hers- no, it was most definitely his fault.

He sighed softly.

"What's on your mind, Armin?" *No Meer.*

No Meer? Had they backtracked so severely that she no longer

"Hey," he felt her nudge his arm with her elbow, "What's been going on in that brilliant mind of yours?"

He turned his head to face her with a playful smirk, " My brilliant mind? What about yours?"

She rolled her eyes with a smile, "Do *try* not to avoid the question, it's unbecoming of you."

He turned his head back to face the sky, "Is it now?"

"Mm," she let a beat pass by before elaborating, "In the short time that I've known you, you've not seemed the type to shy away from what needs to be said- no matter how much it may hurt the listener."

He spoke with a nervous chuckle, "You've got me all figured out, haven't you?"

"Perhaps... though, I'd have even more if you told me what's been bothering you."

He looked back at Hermione to see that her brow was raised at him knowingly.

There was no eluding Hermione's knowing gaze, just as there was no eluding his.

"It's just that... you know what I am now-"

She sent him a confused look.

"-that I'm a Titan, the Colossal Titan even- the *God of Destruction*. It's inevitable, what damage I'll cause- how many lives I'll take... that's not necessarily the greatest look, you know... it's- being... *that*," he choked out resentfully, "is not a good thing to be." *Especially when you're so... when you're so...*

Pure.

He knew how spooked she was during his Titan transformation- how shocked she was by the sight. And by all accounts, she shouldn't have been as friendly as she was. To him- to *all of them*... and yet, *she was*.

And although he wasn't too bothered by the thought when they were first acquainted, it certainly ate at him now.

It was just that... he was *worried* - how could he not be?

He was *riddled* with sins.

He scoffed internally- he was a soldier in a harsh world- *of course, I'd be riddled with sin*... But did Hermione deserve to be tied to that? Did she even *want* to be?

And for all his belief in the inexistence of a good person or a bad one, he couldn't help the uncertain voice in his head that eagerly put Hermione in the category of good.

From everything he'd seen of Hermione- from her altruism, her impartiality, to her kindness towards strangers- he was, shamefully, left wondering if he even deserved to be her *friend* .

"Meer," she grasped his hand in hers and his eyes went from scanning her face to staring at her warm brown eyes.

"If you're worried about how I see you- nothing has changed-"

"-Bu-"

She squeezed his hand gently, "-But *nothing*. From the day we first spoke, and I mean *truly* spoke, I had already watched you eat *someone alive*... if that Titan could even be called you in the first place."

She wiggled closer to him, arms now adjacent, "And I may not have known what that would entail, but it doesn't take away from the fact

that I had already come to terms with it," she took a deep breath, "I was disturbed, yes, but it never lasted long."

His eyes nervously searched her face for falsehood but found none.

"What- what made you come to terms with it so fast?"

She shrugged, "I decided to learn more, judge later."

Armin's Ocean eyes stared, transfixed with her honest gaze.

"And you know what I learned?"

He shook his head, mesmerized by her words, her voice, by her kind, open eyes.

"That you were caring and kind, a person I knew could trust... even though you were quite the sneaky fellow-"

"-hey! I resent that!" Though his words were harsh, his eyes spoke a different tale- one of fondness and joy.

"That that *sneakiness*," she smiled playfully, "was a product of that smart, cunning mind of yours mixed with this military life you live." She looked up at the sky, yet Armin's eyes stayed on her face.

"I learned you were clever, thoughtful, stern yet gentle, a bookworm like me," she smiled softly.

"And I think... I think that everything I've learned and how I feel because of it trumps any way I may feel about you being the *"Colossal Titan"* .

And with her latter words, he became nervous once again. "And... and how *do* you feel about me being the Colossal Titan?"

Her face dimmed with remorse, "Mostly sad."

He was rather surprised by her answer.

"Sad?" He said apprehensively, "Why?"

She looked away, curls dampening with her mood, "It's well- I- I don't- I don't even know if I'm *qualified* to feel this way. There are so many people who've known you longer- who *know* you better- who've cared for you long before I ever entered the picture but... it's because- well, you... you only have thirteen years left. *Thirteen*," she whispered, almost to herself. "And probably even less with your military lifestyle and by *Merlin*, Armin-" She inhaled deeply to try and quell her quickening breath.

Armin's heart stuttered in his chest.

"I can't- I don't want to even *think* of what that could-" her voice faltered abruptly, filled with the distress that she'd been keeping inside since she'd learned. And with that, Armin cursed his incompetency, his awkwardness- he cursed his insecure nature and self-involved despondency.

He immediately rolled onto his side- almost hovering above her- and with his free hand, cradled her cheek. Armin gently turned her face towards his.

He was not there for her then, but, by Maria, he'd be there for her now.

"Mond," he leaned down to let their foreheads touch as her free hand wrapped around to clutch the back of his shirt, "It's okay, mein Mond."

Gradually, she relaxed into his embrace and they began to inhale and exhale in sync, chests moving in harmony.

"I'm here, I'm right here," and Hermione nodded against his head.

She was quiet for a while before she whispered, "But how long will that last?"

"For as long as you'll have me, for as long as you'll stay- I'll be here, I'll make sure of it." And he meant every last word he'd said.

"Oh..."

Oh?

"... that's right, I... I still have to go home."

"You'd- you'd forgotten?"

She sent him a sheepish look, "I mean... the thought is always there- in the forefront of my mind, but sometimes... I tend to forget..." She looked away but he could still see her look was one of guilt.

Oh... Armin blushed.

She forgets when she's with me...

Ignoring the light flutter he felt in his chest, he rubbed gentle circles into her cheek. And since her skin was earth-made flesh he could not make out a blush, but he *could* feel her face warm under his ministrations, see the way her hair seemingly preened at his touch.

He smiled as her face continued to heat and as her hair continued to grow.

How did I get so lucky... as to exist in a world with you in it... even for just a moment .

"I'm honored to have made you feel at home in a place so far from yours. I hope I wasn't *too* much of a distraction though- I wouldn't want you to regret anything." *Especially anything concerning me.*

She shook her head, "Weirdly enough, I... don't really regret anything I've done since I've gotten here. Well- except for..." A small

smile started to creep up on her face, "Except for all those times Uncle Levi made me clean without magic."

Her hand left the back of his shirt to clutch hers instead. She huffed, but it couldn't hide the smile in her eyes, "Ugh, it always left my back feeling as gammy as a quidditch player's."

Armin rolled his eyes at her antics, grateful for this lighthearted respite. *A quidditch player? Surely not to that extent.*

He swiftly rolled onto his back, taking her along with him. And with her lying flush against him, he asked, "This better for your back?"

Stray curls tickled his cheek as she nodded against the side of his head, "Mhm, so much better- *in fact*, I think I've already forgotten what ailed me."

He chuckled into her hair-covered neck as his arms wrapped around her waist, "C'mon Mond, with all that talk of "preferring the muggle way", I'd have thought you'd *love* cleaning for Captain Levi."

"Maybe if Captain Levi wasn't so Captain "Leviy", then sure," she shrugged against his chest.

He breathed out a huff of a laugh, "I thought you were warming up to your..." it was still hard for him to stomach, " *Uncle* Levi. Has he not been up to par lately?"

In all honesty, he thought it was brilliant- a thing of beauty really- the way that two people of extremely different features and backgrounds could see each other as family (even if it was mostly in jest). He just couldn't really get past that last hurdle of referring to the Captain with any type of informality.

"No," she pushed herself up off his chest and caged him with her arms- successfully blocking the sun from his view- *almost like a solar eclipse.*

He chuckled internally. In just how many ways would she be the moon to him?

"He's been fine- his usual grumpy self, but even *then*, I don't regret having ever met him either," she grinned as he tightened his arms around her waist.

"So you really don't regret anything- anything you've done here?"

You don't regret last week?

Hermione shook her head, the ends of her curls brushing against his cheek as she whispered, "I don't regret a thing."

His arms held their tight hold as he tried to understand his own feelings, what they meant- what they said...

Why do you have to go?

Hermione sighed, lowering her forearms onto his chest. She then laid her cheek against her arms and her usually warm eyes looked up at him with sorrow, "For so many reasons... reasons that persistently dim in the light of your presence." He blushed bright red.

She answered me? She heard me-

Merlin! She heard me! He mentally slapped himself upside the head.

"O- oh," he replied, stunned.

In his contemplative, wallowing state, he must've said the question out loud.

Oh Sina, she heard me... but her answer...

Armin looked up at the sky in awe and disbelief. *My presence... really affects her... like that?*

With his arms wrapped around her waist, he slid her up- their heads now leveled- so that he could hide his face in the crook of her neck. Still blushing, he softly asked, "Will you tell me more about your life? I don't mean to pry or to somehow keep you from... leaving but, I just want to know if you'll be happy there- *truly* happy."

Hermione lifted her head to smile down at him, and warm, crinkled eyes danced across his face to admire his honest mien.

She stared into his eyes before focusing on a rather plain section of his shirt.

Nervously, she began playing with its sleeve, "As you know, I have friends- family really- whom I cherish and who cherish me back..."

The people in her photos...

"We've been through so much together- through so many hardships- through hell... and it's... it's hard to see the rest of my life lived without them by my side," she closed her eyes.

"And I have my work... *my life's work*," she sighed, "I've spent the past few years of my life tediously making sure that all the members of Magical society get treated with fairness and humility, and respect."

Her forehead fell to meet his and he closed his eyes in response.

"My career means so much to me- it's my passion- my dream, the rights of those creatures mean so much to me and I've worked so hard to get things to where they are, so I can't give up now- I can't lose it all now..."

Even for you.

"I just hope you can understand..."

He squeezed his closed eyes tight, "I do. Unfortunately, I do..."

"Just-" *don't forget about me when you go.* He sighed, rethinking his next words, "Tell me more about what you do, or why you do it, even *how* you do it- tell me everything you can really. But most importantly tell me you'll be happy."

She hid her face in the crook of his neck and her first attempt to speak ended abruptly in what sounded like the back of her throat, "Well-"

"-And no rationalizing, no sidestepping, just- will you be *happy*?"

She seemed to be in thought for a while.

"I... *will* be happy in a way... tired but... happy. Mmm, satisfied? With a job well done perhaps... content with my friends... It's not the same happiness I receive from being in your presence, but it's happiness nonetheless..." she mumbled into his collar.

Armin nodded in understanding, both warmed and saddened by what she said, "Okay, well," he started, to shift the conversation to something he knew would lift Hermione's mood, "I'm still quite interested in your job, that you actively work for the rights of the "creatures" in your world. Why exactly do you do it? *How* do you do it?"

She physically perked up, head lifting out of the safe space of his neck before she rolled to the side, hands holding and bodies adjacent once again.

She stared up at the darkening sky.

"I've grown up, surrounded by inequality, by the inequalities based on the inherent features that one cannot change... I've been affected by it myself... in a multitude of ways," she sighed, "People have these preconceived notions and propagandized stereotypes about magical creatures- about people that end up hurting said people. I want to help them because I can understand. I want to help them because, as of now, it seems I'm one of the few who want to or can."

Armin thought of the fear-based hatred the rest of the world had towards them, as consequence of the Titan-wielding abilities that the Eldians had. There was a little voice in his head that couldn't begrudge them of their fear- just months ago, they were afraid of Titans themselves...

To be honest, *they still were*.

"But what if some of those stereotypes hold truth, what- what do you do then?"

She smiled a small smile, a kind one that let him know she knew what he *really* meant with those words.

"You remember my friend, the werewolf? The reason why I got here in the first place?"

He nodded.

"Well... he was one of those very cases. He was a potential danger to those around him- but only on full moons, where without the Wolfsbane potion, he could kill his friends, family, or anyone within distance of his wolfish form."

She sighed. "But anytime besides the full moon? He was just like everyone else- meaning he had the same capacity for good and evil as any other wizard or just human even."

She paused as if to mentally test the waters of her next words.

She turned her head to him before squeezing his hand in reassurance.

"Think of your newly acquired powers as another tool you have to protect not destroy. This power isn't evil Armin, and neither are you. You should find ways to use that power- use it to protect the ones you love."

"Your Titan may be the God of Destruction but knowing you, you'll find a way," she almost smirked though sobered quite quickly- that almost smirk transforming into an earnest smile.

"Because you aren't inherently evil, Armin and neither is your Titan... especially when you're so... interconnected and especially when you're so good."

I- I'm good? Hermione thinks I'm good?

B- but-

She continued on, as if what she'd said wasn't something to be debated or reflected on further.

"My friend had a disorder, a disorder in which the treatment for it *drastically* improved the state of his life and those around him. Because when you have Lycanthropy it's not just the people around you who suffer but the person with it most of all."

"Hermione..." but she went on, emboldened by what seemed the dawning of something important.

"And maybe... by Merlin, just maybe, we can make a potion- *something* with similar effects- something that'd give clarity and humanity back into these "pure Titans" just like how the Wolfsbane potion gives clarity to Werewolves. Maybe it will even ease the misery- the agony some of these people must be feeling trapped in those things."

"Because they're really just humans, yes? Stuck in a form that strips them of their humanity- thus making them a danger to the people around them? But if we can just *counteract* that, if we can strip them of the very thing that makes them feared- we can begin the decriminalization process. We can start humanizing Eldians, even *in their Titan form*, to the rest of the world!"

She grinned, "Yes, yes I think that could be done," her eyes sparkled with vision- *hope* - and they gleamed as she ran "Arithmancy" calculations in her head (as he knew she would).

He smiled softly- sadly, endeared by her kindness- her idealism, but he was also intrigued. Was she so sure because she'd seen it done before?

"And the treatment that Werewolves face, is it better now because of it- because of the Wolfsbane potion?"

She dragged her free hand down her face, "Yes- it is. Steadily, but not fast enough for my tastes." She sighed, "Public perception *is* getting better. Mainly because of the reassurance the Wolfbane gives but also because of my friend's role in the... in the war-

War?

"-and the dismantling of the normalized blood purity rhetoric before it. Not to mention the work my department and I do for a *myriad* of-

Blood purity? She's mentioned it before... during those first few days of interrogation...

...

And her friend was a pivotal role in that war?... Her friend...

"-creatures. Our work is breaking down the very boundaries that led to the ostracization of magical creatures. Those myths and stereotypes propagated by blood purists are being countered and debunked little by little every day."

So she must've had close proximity to the war, she was probably targeted by those blood purists-

Dread seeped through his heart. *Her scars...*

She must've been deeply involved in it... emotionally, as a victim, or maybe even physically, as a soldier.

Both would explain the scars...

"To be honest, the "little" traction we've made is leaps and bounds beyond what has ever been attempted before."

'*I've been affected by it myself even', she'd said...*

"Wait wait wait, let's backtrack on that. There was a war?"

She stilled before nodding. She closed her eyes in resignation, "Very unlike the wars and battles you may be used to but a war nonetheless. It was a war started on the pride of a soulless, power-hungry *being* bent on "redeeming" himself from his first great failure. And well... not only that, it was strategically propagated through the guise of blood purity... which, unfortunately, wasn't hard to do."

She opened her eyes and let out a frustrated huff, "Many viewed us as-"*Hm?*

"Us?"

"O-oh," she smiled sheepishly. "I- I know I don't talk about my past too often... especially when it concerns my scars... and, well- I think you've had an inkling about the connotation of them for a while now..."

Her fingers twitched in his hand, presumably *itching* to rub at her scar.

"I was in a war for my life and for the lives of everyone affected by that war."

"It's because, well- I'm not considered magically pure by many in the Wizarding world. To them, my blood has been "muddied" by muggles. To them, we are threats to magic- their magic- stealing it from who they deemed pure and worthy of it."

"Their feelings of fear *used* to be unfounded but understandable- centuries ago, when witches and wizards were murdered by muggles in troves. Now, as you know, we are hidden from the muggle world, "*safe and separate*," she rolled her eyes, "and those feelings are no longer understandable to any degree."

"So... the discrimination in your world is parallel with the danger they are deemed to pose on it?"

"Mm, yes but not exactly. The severity of discrimination towards a person or creature can vary depending on the generalized perception of them from society. Most people in the world are othered by others, and whether that ostracization is systematic or not- life-endangering or not, many times, depends on their stereotypes."

"There are different types- different levels of discrimination and all types of "excuses" to justify them. Gosh, sometimes the stereotypes and generalizations can even positively..." Hermione's eyes grew large in realization, "they can *positively* affect someone's life."

She instantly sat up, Armin following in her stead.

"Yes! Because Metamorphmagi- people who can change their appearance at will- are seen as gifts because of their association with special magic that's common in... certain wizarding families. And they're praised for their powers juxtaposed to how people with Lycanthropy are demeaned, even though if they really wanted, a Metamorphmagus could be just as dangerous as a werewolf."

"It's because they've only been associated with death and suffering in the same way that Titans have only been associated with death and destruction, but look at how much Eren's Titan has helped reconstruct towns and protect your people."

"We just need to prove that Titans can be more than agents of chaos and war- that your abilities can be used for good. Because I know they can, it's just a matter of letting the world know too."

His ears frantically tried to hold on to each word of her rapid speech, it was a talent to be sure.

"Hermione, *Hermione*, I think that's a beautiful idea- a truly wonderful one. And I know that if anyone can achieve it, you can... but- but do you really think people would be willing to change how they view us just because Titans don't seem mindless anymore?"

"I mean, compared to the centuries of legitimate evidence the world has against us, can they really be blamed for not being able to either."

"Armin," she looked back up at the dusky night sky, "People still affected by your ancestors are allowed their frustrations but *never* should their frustrations amount to revenge- especially on such a mass, *non-discriminatory* scale. And neither should their grievances be weaponized by their governments as some sort of *justification* for the oppression of your people."

"Otherwise the cycle will just repeat itself- *like it is now*. And then others will come along with the same justifications against the Marleyans and begin another violent, vicious cycle that will just *never end*."

"Yes, you're right," he acknowledged- as she rarely ever wasn't, "That's what *should* be done... but *will* it?"

Conscious of the way he worded his reply he backtracked, "Don't get me wrong- I'd love to live in a world where people can negotiate first, kill later. I'd love for people to be able to put aside their differences... but everyone's not *us*, Hermione- not everyone can see as far ahead as you and me- care about more than just "me and my own" like you and me."

"We're different and we're far and few between," he sighed, "and that won't change anytime soon..."

Hermione was quiet for a while- every thought imaginable was probably crossing her mind, flowing and connecting to finally land at some sort of conclusion. Whether or not she would voice that conclusion would remain to be seen.

"Hm..." her eyes took on a determined cast, "We'll see... We'll see..."

"I mean, it's been done before- in my land. They weren't perfect fixes, but the oppressed groups *did* come out of their situations better than before. Remember?"

The Americans?

Mm.... although he was in awe of the progress Black Americans made through mostly peaceful/legal opposition, he still felt like their current way of living was nothing he'd view as... ideal- and even if we did manage to live in a multicultural setting, being targeted by any version of this world's MPs or her world's American police were not exactly winning.

Apparently, there were even major riots just a decade before in America- over the excessive, unjust beatings of a black man during an arrest- unjust beatings that still happened regularly.

That's not the life he wanted for himself or for those who would come after him.

"The thing is, we have something they don't."

"Huh? And what's that?"

"A witch willing to get her hands dirty- a witch *able* to get her hands dirty," she smiled.

Hands dirty? Was that a jest or was she...

"There'd be no laws or restrictions preventing me from interfering within your affairs. I'll be able to both discreetly and openly use my

knowledge and skills to accelerate the progress of your cause."

He was curious still, "To what extent are you willing to get your "hands dirty"?"

"I won't be murdering anyone-"

"-no controlling the minds of the masses either- that'd be both unethical and unsustainable-"

Better than me still.

"-Armin," Hermione leaned forward to bring his attention back to her, "You're..." She cupped his cheek, "you're not alone, you know? And you're not evil for it either," she stared into his eyes, willing him to believe it.

"Armin, I've also... ended someone's life."

In his surprise, he sprang forward to lay his hands on her shoulders, "You have?!" Her hand slipped from his cheek.

Easy there, Armin.

He eased the tenseness that his hands had on her shoulders, "I mean, oh- you have?"

She chuckled nervously- awkwardly, her hand rubbing at where he knew her scar to be, "Surprising?"

Well, it shouldn't be. What with me fully knowing you'd been through something traumatizing, it really shouldn't be.

He was speechless for a beat, "I- I mean- yes. Yes. You were just so-"

She raised a brow at him.

He slid his hands down her shoulders to grasp her fidgeting hands, "You just didn't seem like the type to... do that," he finished awkwardly.

She sighed, "You're right, I wouldn't have and- well, I'm still not exactly sure I *have* either- at least, not in the same context."

"But you-"

"I know, I know, it's just that- you know how I alluded to things not exactly being the *best* for me during the war?"

He nodded.

"Well... let's just say there wasn't enough time to check if your spell had made a fatal blow or not..." she said, eyes taking on a sad gleam. But his hands tightened around hers in response- in a show of presence, comfort.

"I know for sure that I've caused at least a couple casualties- and whether they were caused directly or not doesn't change the fact that they're gone because of me."

"I have blood on my hands Armin, but that doesn't make me any less capable of *goodness* and *kindness*, it's the same goodness and kindness that *you* hold for your friends- for your people- for all people."

In his continuing awe of her perspective- her outlook- her forgiveness, he couldn't help but feel a little foolish. In his growing endearment of her, he had neglected to take her off this golden pedestal- a pedestal that was both idolizing and dehumanizing.

And though he held her in high regard still- *an even higher one than myself*, he thought- Hermione was just human, witch or no. *Of course*, she wasn't this "perfect manifestation of goodness"- that was absurd.

That was insulting.

Armin remembered the way she exaggerated her tears in the courtroom, the way she'd get so engrossed in her work she'd forget to check in on herself and the people around her- *Sina*, he even remembered how she exploited Captain Levi's endearment of her to escape doing *chores*.

She was Hermione, flawed and completely capable of exploitation and guile. And although that should've frightened him, it didn't.

In all reality, it only ended up likening Hermione to him even further.

This was the same Hermione he'd known for months. She was always these things- all these things and more... just like he was. The problem was, he'd just been overlooking that though...

"So you see..." She smiled softly- *sadly*- *sheepishly* even, "We're really not so different," she said, rubbing soft circles into the hands holding her own.

Armin smiled.

He wasn't seeing her in a new light, no- he was seeing her in a *clearer* one. One more grounded, but no less appealing- no less admirable.

Armin's face took on a more contemplative mien.

He looked down at their conjoined hands and in that moment, their differences couldn't have been more irrelevant to him.

Their contrasting skin, contrasting languages, even their contrasting *worlds* were a testament to just how meaningless those things really were between them.

It would all pale in the light of just how *right* the feeling of simply *existing* with her really was.

Despite this, despite their shared traits, his self-deprecation persisted- though, now- in a much, *much* less harsh mode.

"I guess we're not..." he said, eyes crinkling with warmth- with an appreciation that was uniquely Hermione's- or uniquely for her, that is.

Eyes still filled with warmth, he looked up to where a crescent moon was making a slow ascension into the night sky.

It reminded him of how fast time seemed to pass when in her company- of how time truly did fly when it was enjoyed, cherished even.

He looked back down only to recognize the moon's effects on Hermione's hair.

Wow, it looks like-

"-like a cloud," he whispered.

"Hm?"

Shit.

"No-" he chuckled, embarrassed, "U-um- your hair- in the moonlight, it's- um- oh nevermind," he smiled bashfully.

"Hey," she cupped his cheek, "It's alright."

Her eyes were encouraging, if not a bit loving, but it was probably all in his head.

"Alright," he breathily replied.

"Well... your hair," he tucked some of the luminous locks behind her ear, "It reminds me of a cloud when the light hits it just so," he gestured to the certain places where the moon's light looked especially beautiful, "Any light in fact, not just the moon's."

"It's beautiful, truly. It's magical," he looked into those, now, familiar brown eyes, " You're magical."

He watched as she looked down bashfully, their roles now reversed, though- he swore he saw the makings of tears in her eyes.

Armin, not wanting to push his luck, segued, "Oh um, speaking of moonlight, we should uh, probably head back now," he began standing up, brushing off any residual dirt and weeds from his body.

He held out a hand to help her up.

"Yes. Yes, that's right," she sniffled and his hand faltered and his heart dropped.

Did he accidentally insult her? Did he bring back bad memories? Did he-

And then she smiled.

She looked up to hold his hand and *the way she smiled*. It just- it stole his breath away.

Her smile was beautiful- *bright*, it replaced his every negative thought with that of the feeling of warmth. Only warmth. Only for her.

Just as her smile was only for him.

"Thank you," she said softly as he helped her stand.

Mesmerized by her gleaming eyes- gleaming eyes that now took on a different context- he could only nod.

She kept her hold on his hand- tightened them in fact. "And Armin? We *can* change the world, you know," she said, almost clairvoyantly, "I know we can."

Her free hand went to cover their clasped ones and she inspected them fondly.

She chuckled, "Us. Together?" She focused her fond appreciation onto his face once again, "We'd be dangerous."

Humoring her, he smiled boyishly and placed his free hand on top of hers, "To us or to them?"

"Both," she said simply.

"Though," a sly smile crept onto her lovely face, "more so for them, don't you think?"

Somehow, his grin grew, "I'd have to agree with you there, mein Mond. Very dangerous indeed."

"Well then, just as you said, let's get our *very dangerous* bums out of here and hurry back home."

Home.

It was only a split second, but the *very mention* of home in relation to a place where they both lived gave him a vision of a future he truly *wouldn't've* minded.

Hermione looked expectantly at him, eyes warm and accepting and bright, and it was directed at him- *for him*.

"Mm," he hummed, "Lets," he smiled softly- at her and for what could be *with* her.

"Let's head back home."

Author's Note:

You can also start requesting Armione one shots for me to do, I've already posted some that you can read on my tumblr (link in bio) and my archive acc.

If their relationship seems to be going too fast in a bad way please let me know! **To clarify, Hermione has been in Paradis for a**

couple weeks over THREE months now.

Once again, thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! Normally, if you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 14

Author's Note: Sorry! It's been a while? but I'm glad to be back! I've had a lot of obstacles this past year but I'm finally more settled. I have no plan of ending this story so you'll see more of me soon! Hope you enjoy it! Thank you for coming back if you're an og reader!

Chapter 14

This was...

This was just wrong.

Hermione was far beyond the point of blaming her ire on culture shock or a brief trice of ethnocentrism. This wasn't a matter of cultural superiority, this was a matter of humanitarianism.

How could they do this to him? How have they been doing this to him? For years.

She watched as Eren tiredly, *despondently* reenacted the experiment- pulling himself out of his damaged, already deteriorating Titan body and transforming into a new one.

Hermione winced as he almost tripped on his own feet, and despite the determination on his face she continued to worry for his health.

Mental, emotional, and physical.

Hadn't they *just* been through this with her- hadn't they seen the consequences of what overworking could do?

What was different then? Surely not much...

She flinched- and not for the first time that day - as she watched Paradis' new *State of the Art* missiles take their turn at Eren's Titan form.

Did they take advantage of his willingness to participate?

Did they see him as their obligation and as an extension, their property?

Or did they just not see the situations as the same- not as bad since Eren could heal- *regenerate* and she could not?

Whatever it was, it didn't sit right with Hermione, *not at all*.

She caught a glance of Hange, nearer than they should've been to the explosions but seemingly unharmed (no doubt with the help of Moblit at their side). They seemed to be wholly invested in their work, oblivious to Eren's discomfort- maybe even accustomed to it.

Maybe she *should've* been mad at Hange, mad at all of them for allowing this. But anger wouldn't help Eren, anger wouldn't change his situation.

Nor would it change Armin's.

It was only a matter of time until the Scouts would find an area big enough and "safe" enough to test Armin's Colossal Titan and it was almost *sure* that he'd receive the same abuse as Eren...

Now how to stop that... or at least minimize these unethical practices...

Coming at Hange with anger, especially as an outsider, would surely escalate any peaceful discussion that could be had. Which Hermione, unfortunately, knew from experience. When Hermione infused even the smallest bits of anger into her proposals it was hard to convince those ol' codgers down at the Ministry to change *anything* as they became stubbornly defensive when she was being... "confrontational".

Ugh, she sighed internally. Logic and some rather detached, dainty empathy it was then. Though... she was new here, freshly accepted.

It might be seen as a tad bit presumptuous of her to be so critical....

She spotted Mikasa in her peripheral vision.

Maybe having some well-respected... authority was needed to help convince them.

If she couldn't do it herself, of course.

From what she could see, Mikasa looked to be tense and stoic. But Hermione knew people. *Well...* she backtracked. Hermione knew Mikasa.

They'd talked for hours- about music, their interests, their worries. And Eren was definitely one of Mikasa's interests *and* worries. When Sasha would often join, the conversation would turn more lively- more upbeat, but when Eren would inevitably become the topic of conversation, *nothing* could stop the melancholy from settling in.

She walked over to her, preparing herself for thoughtful discourse at best and cold detachment at worst.

"Mikasa," Hermione began, to be polite, knowing full well that Mikasa had seen her come towards her the moment she moved.

She stood at a pleasant distance, intimate enough for discretion but not enough to invade personal space.

Hermione took a deep breath, knowing just how sensitive a topic concerning Eren was for her.

Rip it off like a bandaid, as her father would say, or *make haste like an Episkey* in the Wizarding world...

Funny, that.

"What do you think of all of this? *Surely*, you can't be okay with this."

Mikasa stilled further and remained silent for quite a while.

"Are... you okay with this?" Hermione continued hesitantly.

She shook her head softly, hair falling into her eyes.

"Is Eren?"

Her eyes unfocused in thought, more like in memory.

"He-" she stopped herself, reluctant to share his thoughts. She looked into Hermione's eyes, and she must've seen something-worry, care, confusion- to make her continue, "He said he was."

Hermione nodded. "And do you believe him?"

Mikasa took her time like always, a trait Hermione had always respected.

"Sometimes yes, and sometimes no."

"I see," Hermione paused, "And lately? Since the funeral?"

"He... seems tired of the experiments," she nodded to herself, "Irritated at times yet... uncaring during others."

Hermione absorbed the new information with care, "Uncaring... like resigned?"

"Almost- maybe. I'm not quite sure."

"I could um, give my insight if that's okay?"

"Mm," she hummed affirmatively, and Hermione could feel her whole posture change slightly. She could feel her spine straighten and her muscles tense, taking on a more professional disposition.

Is this what always happens?

Yes, I mean- of course, I would speak differently... but my whole body? Is this why I'm always so wound tight... because I'm always...

in the mindset of working?

And why have I only just noticed now?

Ugh, let's get back to this at a not-so-critical time.

"You know how I work to protect creatures' rights back in my world?" She continued as Mikasa nodded, "Well, based on multiple past interactions I've had with other "so-called creatures" I can see this possibly being a response to feeling dehumanized or realizing and digesting this is what he's been feeling all along. And well... this may also be an "outside" factor," she suggested, giving Mikasa a knowing look.

"Maybe your experimentation techniques need a change, or maybe he needs an intervention of sorts- just close friends. You and Armin perhaps? Buts- well, that's just my suggestion," Hermione shrugged.

Mikasa nodded in kind, taking in Hermione's words with much thought.

"We have been trying to talk to him about..." She shook her head, effectively interrupting her speech, "But maybe not as hard as we could..."

Although tense, she seemed a bit more sure of her words.

Mikasa's eyes looked far off at Eren in the distance, "But who knows? Maybe this change is just a phase. A phase that he'll naturally return from... or maybe he's maturing- he's older now, the battle may have been a wake-up call to how easily we might have been destroyed if not for..." Her eyes returned to Hermione's.

"Me... yeah, okay."

Hermione sighed, "But Mikasa... Eren's been exhibiting some troubling symptoms regardless-"

" -*Symptoms?* Like a disease?" Her brows furrowed.

"Well, not exactly. No. More like a condition or disorder... but I can't speak with much certainty until I know him longer. But *you*, Mikasa, you know him, and um maybe we can speak in more depth about this later?"

She nodded, "Please. I think this is long overdue."

Hermione nodded in return, "And whatever you *do* decide to do... after we talk and all, I trust your judgment. You've known him your whole life- I've only just arrived to witness this change."

She was about to move away before deciding to say one last thing.

"And- just... take care of him- and yes, I *know* you will, like you always do... but... take care of him here," she placed her palm on her chest, "and here as well," she moved her hand to gesture to her mind.

"Yes," Mikasa nodded and almost to herself says, "of course... We might need to have a talk with Eren- Armin and I- soon."

Hermione's smile was gentle as she put a comforting hand on Mikasa's shoulder.

"I've been thinking... I also need to go and talk to Hange about how they've been running their experiments..."

She looked to the side to watch as a giddy Hange interrogated a sullen-looking Eren fresh from his Titan form.

"About a lot of things actually... Anything to help, yeah?"

She nodded with a hint of a smile on her lips, "Yeah, thanks, Hermione."

"Of course," she squeezed her shoulder, "of course," she emphasized.

"And Hermione?"

She looked up to see a slight smirk on her face.

"If you find yourself unable to... persuade them yourself. Tell them I-tell them that I fully support your decision."

"Mikasa..." Hermione was as pleased as she was a bit surprised at the open endorsement.

"For Eren, right?"

Hermione hummed in agreement.

"Well then, for what it's worth, good luck."

Hermione let out a bark of laughter at the sudden snark.

"Thanks," she grinned, "But I don't think I'll need it."

Mikasa smiled, then walked away.

She herself walked away feeling lighter, less tense, accomplished even... the people he cared for would be there for him, now more than ever...

She winced. *Hopefully enough to make a change...*

Spotting Hange, she took a few deep breaths before apparating to their side.

"Hermione!" Hange jumped in surprise.

"Hey Hange," she smiled sheepishly, "I was just um, just wondering if we could talk," Hermione side-eyed Moblit's watchful gaze and Eren's curious one.

"In private..." she added, "preferably now."

"Why? What's going on?" They frantically looked around for anything abnormal to identify... abnormal to them at least.

Hermione thought a lot of things were abnormal around them- or unethical at the very least.

"No no, nothing," she moved closer to be more discreet, "I just have a few suggestions, that's all."

"Oh! Great! What were you thinking?"

She walked into a more deserted area, guiding Hange towards her.

"Well, is it okay if I ask a few questions first? Just to clarify some things."

"Yes yes, of course. What are they?" They lifted a brow in curiosity.

"It's just that- well- have you ever considered how ethical an experiment might be?"

They visibly flinched, "Ethical?"

"Yes, like if you'd gotten the enthusiastic consent of your subject after familiarizing them with the experiment. Or if you've ever made the effort to make sure the subject," her eyes briefly glanced in Eren's direction and Hange's intuitively followed, "doesn't feel dehumanized. Things like that."

They furrowed their brows.

"I see," they went to rub their chin in thought. Hange seemed to then shift into one of their rare, more serious moods.

"I would never intentionally *irreversibly* harm one of our own, especially Eren. We've learned not to take it *too* far, and besides, Eren's always been up for my experiments- though, he hasn't been as enthusiastic about them as he once was..."

"Yes, he-" Hermione sighed, "I've only seen how he's been lately so I have little reference to how it was before but... we see it, we all see it, Eren's been different- depressed, more like he *has* depression-"

"Huh?"

"-or from what I've heard, is bipolar-

"Huuuh?"

"Later, later," she waved them off, "But all I'm trying to say is that he needs help... and the way things have been... hasn't been helping."

They stood in thought for quite a while. "Hmmmmmm, I don't know... Would this benefit his performance? Ethics?"

"Oh *greatly*."

"Hmmmmmm."

With an answer like that, Hermione felt a little more confident that she could win this.

And without name-dropping Mikasa in the process? A win indeed.

"I've done my fair share of experiments before Hange, I even found my way here because of one."

They nodded eagerly for her to continue.

"In my world, we've already gone through this process of trial and error, been through the early stages of scientific experimentation. I've learnt them, studied them, and applied them to my own work. Implementing more ethical practices warrants more *accurate* results. Factors can be better isolated and tweaked to reach the desired outcome. This *works*, Hange. *Please*, please, try it, I know it does."

Hange's eyes were dissecting but their lips smiled in amusement, "You really care about him, huh?"

Hermione smiled softly in return, "I care about *all* of you."

"I care about people period," continued wistfully.

Slip it in, Hermione. Here's your chance! If you can do it for Eren- for Armin, you can do it for him too.

"And that's why..." she added hesitantly, "I'm also worried about Zeke Yeager-"

At Hange's intense, questioning gaze she hurried to explain herself.

"-he's still human, Hange. His experiences as a Marleyan child soldier have literally conditioned him to- to be this way. You heard what Eren's dad said- they've ingrained this self-hatred in him so deep that he ratted out his own parents and now? He's killed the innocent lives of his own people."

Her chest heaved and her eyes widened, almost as if it was in an added attempt to implore them.

She took a deep breath to calm herself.

"All I'm saying is that you shouldn't act with cruelty but he shouldn't exactly be... well, *trusted* or- or pampered either. He should be well fed- his basic needs met: water, shelter, physical comfort-"

Or some modicum of it at the very least... She knew he could regenerate like the other cognitive Titans, he was likely being continuously amputated to keep him docile in prison. And with the lack of her world's modern medicine? Or magic? That couldn't have been anything less than excruciating.

"-because you hold the upper hand. You, Erwin, the MP's, you hold his life in your hands, you are his God at the moment- please, be a kind one."

As Hermione's request tapered off in a gentle plea and Hange sighed, rubbing their temple with the heel of their palm, "I'll... see what I can do- talk to Erwin first, maybe bring you with me, but understand this, Hermione. This isn't a primary priority, this *isn't* a

priority, period. There is much, *much* more we have to worry about than Zeke Yeager's *comfort*—"

Hermione's opened her mouth to question their language but Hange cut her off with a dismissive wave.

"We're fighting in a war we didn't even know we were in till a couple months ago. Our lives- our country is at stake..."

At that, Hermione physically conceded.

"Zeke Yeager memories, his knowledge is invaluable, yes- his body, not so much. So until we find a suitable candidate to take his place, Zeke Yeager will most likely suffer... or... maybe not," they shrugged in indifference, "we'll see."

"With Eren, we can make some changes, he's our own, one of us, but don't be surprised when the same concessions aren't made for *him*," they finished, their look oozing finality.

Hermione nodded, resigned but also grateful, "Thank you, Hange, for listening and for trying. I truly appreciate it."

"Mm, of course, Hermione," they waved their hand dismissively as if it was no big deal, "It's hard to not think of you as one of our own- what with all the help you've given us and all the time we've spent together."

Her breath hitched and she felt her chest ache with hints of joy and pride.

She knew it already, of course- sensed it, felt it. If she ran down a list of "things people do or say when they care about someone" she could confidently say she was on the receiving end of many of them.

But to have it so candidly said? And by Hange?

It honored her.

Next up, Levi, she internally humored.

But despite her nearly-overwhelming happiness, she also felt emboldened by this new development. The cogs in her brain turning to reach her goal... well, *one* of her goals. Getting home.

"Im- I'm honored Hange, truly."

They laughed heartily, "Of course you are, we're the best! Being one of us is a privilege, you know," they grinned.

"Oh I know, but forgive me if I'm being biased, Hange but I've got a right lot of people who'd justly compete for that number one spot."

"Oh ho ho, that's right! You've got other friends!"

Why'd they have to say it like it was a surprise, she thought a bit agitated but humored.

Anyways...

She laughed it off regardless, " Yes Hange, I do happen to have other people I know... *and* love. They just so happen to be in another dimension," she ended forlornly and maybe a bit bitterly too.

Way to lay it on thick, Hermione.

"Mm..." they grinned, " So you love us, huh?"

That's all you gauged from my statement?

"Of course, Hange, *especially* Uncle Levi," Hermione rolled her eyes but smirked nonetheless.

Cough. "Especially Armin" Cough.

She groaned internally but smiled anyways, *Merlin.*

"But yes, I love many *many* people, and *many* of them I might never see again."

She tried for a more direct approach and stared into Hange's eyes, a faint scar on the lid of their left eye from the previous battle barely discernible from this distance.

"I *need* to see them again."

They sighed. "We'll see what we can do, but we'll need to take precautions of course, just in case you *are* another traitor," their eyes narrowed then brightened immediately.

"Otherwise, I don't see the problem with a few more heavily monitored experiments, and by your design- with all your otherworldly ethics! Exciting!"

Hermione playfully rolled her eyes then shot Hange a genuine smile, "I don't know if exciting is what I'm aiming for here but... thank you. You guys don't have to do this but you are and... and again just... thank you."

She was so grateful for their trust in her, despite everything they'd been through. She'd have been disappointed if they refused or postponed but she'd *understand*. Hermione herself didn't do too well with traitors either.

Sometimes she went too far with them...

Sorry, Marietta Edgecombe.

"You didn't *have* to save our asses out there during the battle, but you did- and a whole lot of other stuff too, so consider this getting even," they patted Hermione's shoulder to console her.

To Hermione, it just wasn't enough to get even, she felt the need to truly prove to them where her heart stood.

So she began to dig in her beaded bag, and after more than a couple of seconds of being arm deep, she pulled out something special.

She paused, holding the technology close to her chest, marking the importance of its transfer into unfamiliar hands.

"Here, take it. Please," she pressed the cold metal warmly into their hands. "Use it to document experiments- capture memories. Use it to make history."

Hange stuttered, eyes bugging through their goggles. "Is- is this..."

"Yep, your very own camera. Magical even. To take *photos*."

"*Photos*..." they cooed, holding the camera as if it was fragile china.

"*Moving* photos," Hermione replied proudly.

"Whaaaaaa," their eyes glazed over

"Mhm."

There was a beat of silence in which Hange's scarily still body inspected the device.

"Yahooooo!" They suddenly jumped- causing Hermione to flinch involuntarily- arms waving, reaching a height Hermione didn't think was possible from their beginning stance.

Her body relaxed and she smiled.

Now, why didn't she think of giving it to them sooner? She could always get another one at home. She could afford it, easily so, but the timing worked out well enough- was quite organic if she'd say so herself. So ultimately, Hermione felt no need to fuss over what could've been, because what was happening was already a cherished sight.

"So you like it?" Hermione asked redundantly, a smirk on her lips.

"Wha- a- a-," they spluttered, "Of course I do!"

Hermione could only laugh in response.

"Really Hermione, Thank you. If this is a bribe, it's a pretty damn good one," they said closely eyeing the camera.

"Well it's not- just a gift... buuuut, if it manages to further convince you, you won't hear me complain."

"Convince us to change our experiments or allow you your own?"

Both.

She shrugged, "Both."

"Fair," they shrugged back, still grinning.

"So yes to both then?" She prodded.

Still partly distracted, they said, "I'll *try* to advocate for both."

Close. A win to be sure, but not quite what I was going for.

"Yes, yes, of course," she nodded, hands clasped, still giddy.

But what will this win be if not secured in the end?

She leaned forward, "And it's good you say that, Hange. Mikasa told me herself she would prefer to do it my way."

Hange's head snapped at the sound of Mikasa's name.

It was a bit cartoonish, but nevertheless endearing. Coupled with the odd mix of awe, annoyance, and curiosity on their face, *s urely* they understood what her support implied.

"Huuuuuuuh, why didn't you just lead with that?!"

"Uh, oops?"

"Oops, oops? " They glared at Hermione knowingly, playfully. "You just wanted to see if you could yourself, huh?"

She scoffed but her lips couldn't help but form a smile, "... mmm, maybe."

"Mmhm. Well, just know you got there in the end," a hand clasped her shoulder.

"So... we'll go?" She egged on.

Hange pulled her close and wrapped their arm around her shoulder in an almost painfully tight yet endearing embrace, "I'll make it happen *once*, but after that, it's *all* up to Erwin- I won't interfere, Hermione."

Success!

Hermione grinned.

Despite their stern tone, hope bloomed in her chest.

Home was just on the horizon.

The only problem was her new home was helping her get there...

Author's Note:

You can also start requesting Armione one shots for me to do, I've already posted some that you can read on my tumblr (link in bio) and my archive acc.

Once again, thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! Normally, if you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send

them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

To the guest who left this comment: "This is such a cute fanfic! I love how you write the characters!" Thank you so so Much! Its an honor for you to say such! I hope to keep writing them in a way you enjoy in the future! 3

To the guest who asked: "Why make her black?" Well, because that's the way I imagine her tbh. And thematically it ties in more later:) I, myself, am black so it just makes me happy to write about her like that, I don't know ahahaha.

Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 15

He woke to the sound of screams- awful, *awful*, blood-curdling screams.

Sheets were hastily thrown as Armin bolted from his bed, uncaring of the state of his attire and wholly consumed by fear.

Nightshirt and pants in disarray, he ran barefoot out of his shared room, door wide open and bunk mates left awoken in confusion.

The slapping of feet echoed down the cold, stone floors of the hallways and he panted more so out of adrenaline than physical inadequacy.

His heart suddenly dropped in his chest as the screams increased in volume. A million thoughts ran through his head.

What if she's dying? What if she's in pain?! What if she'll be gone by the time I'm there? What if I never see her again?!

Then again... what if it isn't her...

I'd still care, of course, but...

This was different.

In his gut, he knew it was. He feared it but he *knew* it was her.

Hermione.

He didn't know *how* he knew, considering he'd never heard her scream, but it could be no one else's- no other scout. No- it had to be *her's*.

He picked up his pace at the thought, as impossible as it seemed. But it felt like her room was miles away. Like time had slowed and a

five-minute walk had become hours.

Finally, he skid to a stop in front of her open door, no guard in sight.

No no no no no no no-

He bolted inside and threw open her tent flap. The scream's volume increased in the direction of her room.

Hermione.

In his continued panic, Armin sped into the bedroom to find Klaus Müller, Hermione's assigned guard for the week, meters away from her bed, petrified.

Armin felt ill.

Hermione's sickly form was thrashing, tangled in bloody sheets. Her hair was in disarray as her bonnet lay on the floor; her face was stuck in various grimaces of pain as she screamed.

Hermione.

He rushed to her side, hands clutching the sheets, afraid to worsen her condition any further. The fear then rushed from his mind as he remembered that open wounds needed pressure to help them close.

"Klaus," he addressed, ripping her sheets to form a makeshift bandage. He shook as he wrapped the bandages around her arm, shook as he applied pressure to her arm, he shook as she began to *wail*. Yet he heard nothing from Klaus.

"Klaus!" He growled.

That seemed to catch his attention.

"Y- yes?"

He cursed. The blood had easily seeped through the bandages, soaking it crimson. And he could hear the distant sound of hushed whispers and shoes clicking against cold, stone floors.

"What happened?"

His voice held an edge. He'd asked a question but he recognized that it was also a threat. A threat with a hint of fear.

"I- I was in my own head when she started screaming- daydreaming, you know? I was so confused at first. Why was she screaming in the dead of night?" He asked himself rhetorically.

Armin grabbed at more fabric to apply over the soaked bandages.

"And I didn't really know what to do so I just opened the door to investigate. I was, um, hesitant to enter her tent but it was an emergency so I went in and I followed the screaming to what I assumed was her bedroom."

Armin urgently motioned for him to continue, applying more bandages while assessing Hermione's body for further injury.

"She was still in bed but she didn't look right- I- I mean, she didn't look *healthy*. And then she moved and I started seeing blood on her sheets... and then she screamed *again* and... She- she didn't look as... " *bad*" as she does *now* but-," he said, his useless words barely heard over Hermione's screams, "and it only started a few moments before you got here, Armin, I swear."

Okay, that's a start.

"Were the-"

"Oi! What's with all the noise?"

He saw Captain Levi at the tent's bedroom door, their friends around him, and faintly he could hear a crowd forming around the tent's entrance behind them.

"It's Hermione, Sir, she's still asleep but she's been screaming- and bleeding. I only just got here and I'm not sure how to proceed."

He looked Armin dead in the eyes. "I know how to proceed. Wake her up."

"Captain-" Jean started, but Armin beat him to it.

"But sir, we don't know what that'll do! What if it worsens her condition?!"

"Well we won't know if we don't try-

"-what if I don't *want* you to try!" He almost growled.

As the Captain's eyes widened by just a fraction Armin relented by an inch. "Sir," he added.

The captain sighed, massaging the bridge of his nose, "Armin. I understand that you *care* for her, but you're caring is only getting in everybody's way. It might even be getting in *her* way. So just suck it up and *wake her up.*"

"I-

"-go on," Captain Levi said, arms crossed, pointing his chin in Hermione's tortured form.

He heard Mikasa make a grunt of disapproval, obviously not happy with the Captain's decision but unable to defy her superior without consequence.

Or without blowing this possibly "harmless" situation out of proportion.

He sighed and Armin's hand inched down to shake her shoulder. Gentle but firm was his grip as he rocked her back and forth. But she only groaned in response. Seconds later and it seemed Armin's tender approach took a bit too long for the Captain's liking.

For it wasn't Armin's gentle hand on Hermione's shoulder that stopped the screams but Captain Levi's forceful yet steady grip on her upper arms.

"Oi, wake u-"

With a gasp, Hermione woke. Wide, frightful eyes, and all.

Chest heaving as if she could no longer breathe, she bat away the Captain's arms and scrambled to find her wand.

Ever the initiator, Armin quickly scanned her bed and grabbed at the sliver of wood seen under the covers.

He grabbed her hand and placed the wand in her palm before curling her fingers around its handle. Holding it in place, he looked her in the eyes before reassuring her with the tightening of his hands around hers. "It's here, right here. We're here-"

I'm here.

"And it's going to be okay," he spoke in her native tongue hoping it would comfort her.

With her free hand, she grasped Armin's as she began to regain an awareness of her surroundings.

He spotted Klaus from his peripheral vision and instantly eyed him to leave. Once gone he continued his soothing coos.

"It's alright, Hermione," he sat at the edge of her bed, bloody hands still connected as he allowed her to rest her body weight against him. "Hermione."

"It's going to be alright."

He could feel her body slowly relax against him.

Hermione suddenly tensed against him, and he could feel the weight of her head lift off his side.

He followed her line of sight as she relaxed once again, likely from recognizing it was only their friends in her bedroom and no one else.

Almost defeated, she slumped up against him once more and let out a groan of frustration.

"I always speak out of the tent so why would I bother,' I thought- 'silencing my bedroom every *night* is enough,' I thought," she muttered darkly.

Did he hear her correctly?

Silencing her room every night?!

This has been happening every damn night?!

"Ugh," she released one of her hands from their hold to rub her face in self-loathing. Blood smeared her cheek and her damp curls limply framed her face.

Finding her able to talk, he tried for a question. "Are you... alright?"

Of course she isn't, you idiot, who would?

She nodded softly, "I'm fine, I'm fine. This is fine," she said gravelly, then made an attempt to clear her throat. "This is a fairly... regular occurrence that I've since grown used to..." she ended softly, staring at the blood on her sheets eyes, passing by the heavy redness on her arm. "It's fine."

Armin was mortified.

No, it was definitely not fine.

"This happens often...?"

"... Often enough," she answered bitterly.

"Oh," he glumly realized, as he *had* heard her right. "You've been using magic to hide it."

"Yes," she nodded. "Most nights, yes. But apparently not this one," her eyelids were shut tight, and with a wave of her wand vanished the blood from their sight.

But she could never vanish the sight of it from his mind.

Even if there was a spell for such a thing... he shuddered to think such a thing existed.

"It doesn't *happen* every night but the possibility was large enough that I felt the need to use my magic to hide it."

"So... but... what exactly was *it* that was *happening*?" Connie asked. And Hermione hummed in a non-response before opening her eyes.

But Armin found himself searching for her eyes and silently asking if she were okay to answer.

She nodded and Armin then helped her to sit up without using his body as a crutch. But he still sat next to her for support.

She thanked him wearily.

His heart began to palpitate. It seemed she was ready to tell them. He knew she, at times, felt guilt for omitting so much of her past, but it was understandable to Armin. It was traumatic and painful, and he felt honored with all the new bits of information he'd been receiving over the past month. Honored that she felt secure enough to entrust him with her history- her heart. And he was happy to see she was finally entrusting *them* too.

She eyed them with uncertainty. An uncertainty he was sure came more from her fear of judgment than her lack of trust. She looked

away, "That," she summoned a glass of water that she then took a sip from, "is what you call a cursed nightmare."

After various chimes of confusion, a voice shushed them all for her to continue.

"As in literally? Someone *cursed* your dreams?" Hange asked sadly.

Connie seemed anguished, " *Why?*"

Fidgeting uncomfortably at the question, the telltale signs of defeat still marred her face. Despite it all, she found the courage to answer.

"No. No one's cursed my dreams- not directly at least..." she started softly.

"You all know about my arm," she frowned.

Yes, how could I- we ever forget?

She tucked her left arm closer to her belly, "and my neck," her hand raised to reach for the leaking wound before suddenly dropping.

She shook her head as if to shake herself of bad thoughts.

Armin, himself, wanted to reach for the wound. And for the wound on her arm that was probably bleeding just the same.

He wanted to stop the leak, to stop the bleeding- *to heal the pain*, but he didn't possess the type of powers to do so.

And even though *Hermione* did, she didn't make a move to stop the bleeding either.

"The reason why they look so fresh is because..." she let out a shaky breath, "they're cursed."

"Oh," Mikasa replied softly.

"And with that comes the nightmares and when I'm awake it's the voices. Though- only when my body fails me," she added sheepishly.

Did she hear the voices when she was sick? Is that why she became so manic? By the look on her face, he'd guess so.

"Voices? As in..." Sasha inquired.

She chuckled morosely, "Not multiple- no. Just one, just the one," she ended bitterly.

"The one that did this to you?" Armin asked knowingly, kindly.

She nodded, "Mm, yes."

"She's dead now, so it's alright... I just- I just wish she could die in more ways than one..."

For Hermione's sake, Armin wished so too. Wished he could do more about it. Wished he could understand the complexities of magic. Wished he was more fluent in English to fully grasp the nuance of her books so he could research.

Armin wanted to *do* something for her- *anything*. And in that moment he felt just as useless and just as pathetic as his 15-year-old self that all he could offer was words and comfort and not a solution.

Which I am usually good at, he grumbled internally.

"But *why* would anyone do that to another human being? That's- it's vile," he looked up from the bed to find Eren's face displaying equal parts fury and confusion.

"You didn't- *do* something to them, did you?" He added darkly.

"*Eren*," Armin challenged coolly.

Hermione waved her hand in dismissal, putting a swift end to the disagreement.

"No. Nothing but exist," she whispered darkly in return, glaring at the shadows in the corner of her room.

He watched as Eren's eyes widened in a sort of revelation. As if he was seeing her in a new respect- as if he'd just discovered what identified her as one of their own.

It was most likely that he'd just discovered a personal connection between them. He'd been trying to befriend her... for his and Mikasa's sake- to connect with her the way they had. But It was a connection he'd said he just couldn't see, couldn't *feel*.

Until now, I guess.

"I... see..."

"It didn't help that I was best friends with enemy number one- that I actively opposed them."

Her eyes grew hard, unaware of Eren's expanding list of regard. "It just happened to make me the most well-known example of a scapegoat used by those *bigots*," she spat, "And *opportunistically*, I was to be made an example of."

"So... you were a scapegoat? But for what?"

"For the problems within pureblood society. Witches and wizards who could trace their magical lineages for centuries."

Armin knew. Knew what they were all discovering- what it really came down to. That everywhere- *always* all it ever came down to was just another thing you couldn't control.

She had explained how her parents had no magic- that she'd grown up not knowing about it in the way she did now. That, in the beginning, her zeal and excitement to soak up all she could

influenced her school years, personality, and even view of magic itself.

Again, he thought, how could that be any bounds to hate someone? How could that be spun sinisterly? Unlike Eldians and Marleyans, both groups had the same powers- were similar in more ways than different.

One group wasn't more of an innate weapon- er *potential* weapon, he corrected- than the other.

"But *why*, Hermione, why did they hate you so much? Enough to do that?" Jean asked.

"Some people hate others because it's all they know, all they've been taught, and maybe even all they *have*, really. It's pathetic," she shrugged.

Eren visibly stiffened.

Interesting, Armin thought.

"Some would lose their whole identity and their whole purpose for living if their established worldview were to crumble. They'd have to pick up the pieces- start anew- work to be a better them, and that's *hard*. Hating is easy, *loving* is hard. Besides, why would they live their life any differently if society hadn't had any real consequences for them by doing so? *That's* why. Or partly. I can't say the same for every bigot to ever exist."

Eren grew angrily pensive at her response. "What could cause such hatred? Hatred for hatred's sake. This- *unjustified* hatred."

"Well... some could say their ancestors *were* justified to be weary of us- to feel hatred even. Even *I'm* inclined. We were a danger to their safety centuries ago- when muggles- er no magic-wielding peoples would kill us in droves."

She picked at the skin around her nails, "Now? There's no excuse- no concrete proof for the bigotry they spew. It's hateful and ignorant and it's *deplorable*."

"They believe we are stealing their magic, taking it, diminishing their general birth rates, and increasing their squi- people with no magic born to magical families."

"But we aren't doing that- their *inbreeding* is."

"Oh- Oh ew! You mean they...?" Jean visibly blanched, as did most of the room.

Sasha gave a nervous side eye to those disgusted. "Uh? You guys don't marry cousins?"

"Sasha, I know you're a village girl, but there's *no way*!"

"-Why don't you let her finish, hm?"

"Yes, Captain," Sasha and Jean chorused.

Hermione took a deep breath, though a smile could be seen through the erudite. Armin couldn't help but have a secret smile of his own.

"Yes, Jean, if you mean incest? Then yes. Mostly distant- at most first cousins," she glanced at Sasha, "But done long enough to make every pureblood marriage an inbred one."

"Do you think that had an effect on their- yah know? Heads?" Hange's eyes glinted in the light of Hermione's bedroom.

"They *do* seem to churn out more sadistic people on average- though, that could just be a byproduct of hearing pureblood ideology since birth. But the inbreeding seems to have more bearing on fertility than anything else."

"Then there- well- everything's solved! Just marry *out* of the whole... pure... blood thing!"

Sasha paused.

"Wonder if that kind of stuff's had an effect on me," she thought out loud.

"Wouldn't be surprised," Connie spoke through a cough.

"We'd be on the same boat dumbass-"

" -*Sure*, Sasha. They *could* just marry muggle-born, half-bloods, muggles even, but it's unlikely. Decades of indoctrination can be broken, yes, but enough to convince a whole group *not* to marry within their own culture or own friend groups? No, we're not there yet."

"Not anyone I personally know at least- purebloods that grew up spewing that sort of thing."

Eren's face dropped into his, now usual, stoicism, "You're saying you know purebloods who have changed?"

She nodded, "Mm, it took a war but many are honestly trying. A couple are mates of mine now too."

Eren's eyes widened and he stepped forward to grip the foot of her bed. Almost pleadingly he asked, "But don't you want retribution? Don't you want revenge?"

"Yes? Not really? I don't know," she replied sadly. "I don't think so, not in the way you mean. I get angry at times, but I-"

"-You've suffered so much by their hands. I *know* you've watched others suffer the same-"

Hermione flinched. "-yes, but-

At Hermione's discomfort Armin grew tense, " *Eren*," he warned.

"-don't you want to avenge them? Don't you feel like you owe it to them? -"

"-Gods, yes-"

"-then fight for them!"

Armin looked back and forth, struck by the most emotion he's seen on Eren in days and surprised by their sudden row.

"I am fighting for them. Fighting for them in a way that fosters peace, not destruction," she argued.

Eren could only glare.

"But-"

"-Don't you want to prevent something like that from ever happening again? I do. I'm tired of fighting, Eren. I'm tired of war."

"War is inevitable," he persisted.

"War is also preventable, postponable. It's in our blood as *humans*," she emphasized to all, but Armin felt especially singled out as she squeezed his hand, "to fight, to be frightened, to be angry, but it's also in our blood to protect, to love, to care."

"We are *not* mindless animals, we are *not* pure titans, we can be reasoned with-"

"-ha!"

"-it may take *time*, it may be hard, and it may feel impossible at times but it's worth the effort."

"It has to be," she muttered under her breath.

Eren shook his head, lips set in a firm line. "I just don't understand how you can just *let this go*."

She eyed Eren without malice- without judgment, only curiosity.

"You haven't really fought a war with humans, have you?"

"Hermione?" His body stayed tense, yet his face slid into that of worry. He was hesitant to see where this led. He trusted Hermione- knew she only could mean well, but the topic was a sensitive one for the group.

"Sorry, sorry. I know you've fought them in a battle- in a fight, but not in a war. You've only really fought Titans, Titan shifters in battle- maybe humans if they got in the way... but against a government?" She sighed.

"I don't mean to patronize- and Gods I know I'm being presumptive but believe me when I say this- the effects of human-on-human war are more devastating than you can imagine."

"Yes, both have and *can* leave generations haunted and recuperating. Find children and innocents caught in the crossfire- disfigured, traumatized, and *dead*. But those were casualties made with the intention of defeating mindless, evil, inhumane monsters. It was more taxing physically, yes, but emotionally, killing humans when those humans are the enemy because of *differing views* instead of an obstacle to defeating evil is just... different."

"It's almost always as if the point was moot- as if those deaths were preventable- as if there was always another way."

To Armin's fascination, Eren's eyes tightened, almost in pain.

Armin was as equally curious about the meaning of Eren's reaction as he was unfortunately bugged by her input on their experience. Her habit of trying to help those around her- whether they liked it or not- also led her to *clash* with those around her. Which was infuriatingly endearing- adorably irritating even.

It was undeniable that she held more worldly knowledge, but she'd also not been there for the grief they shared over those they'd killed. If he were honest, it felt like she was minimizing the extent of their pain. It felt preachy, it felt out of touch, it felt wrong.

"I know I'm overstepping. I know I have no say in your political affairs, but I care about you- all of you."

"Hermione, I know you care but from everything I've heard-" Armin started.

"-Caring means caring about *all* of us. Eldians will continue to die if we don't fight, Hermione."

She sent an apologetic glance toward Armin while addressing Eren. "What will that kind of fighting do, Eren? Create more death? More conflict? What happens when you win? When the people are rightfully angry and impart that anger into the real world? It'll just start the cycle all over again. The way Marley did to you. I don't want to be a Marley, and I sure as hell hope you don't either."

And at the end of it all, Armin felt the same. What good would fighting do if it didn't *end* the fighting? It wasn't sustainable, it wasn't a world he'd want to impart on anyone. Death until the end of death was not a practical future.

Eren growled, "I don't want to oppress them- I don't *need* to oppress them. I just want to be free."

"And what does that freedom look like, Eren?"

"Like-" he stilled.

He was frozen, eyes glazed and stoney, mind stuck in a place so far away that Armin feared they were losing him- that he was already lost.

Eren... Armin leaned towards his friend, ready to support him in any way he could.

"*Eren?*" Mikasa worried, reaching for his shoulder.

More silence followed before Hermione broke it. "... *Eren?* Hey, I didn't mean to-

"It's... fine," he replied steely. "If that's what works for your world- in your world- that's great. But don't go preaching to ours when you clearly don't understand-

Hermione leaped forward and out of their embrace, looking ready to lock horns. So did Mikasa, which put Armin on an even greater edge.

"I don't understand?! What about *this* screams I don't understand?!" She gripped her forearm, holding it out for him to see. Blood oozed out of her bandages and onto her hands- her sheets. She clenched her teeth as she continued.

Armin scrambled to his knees at the sight. He pulled more sheets from under him and around her to apply pressure and stop the bleeding, no matter how futile.

"Believe me when I say I am *not* letting this go. There are times when I do want them to suffer, to understand my pain- to *feel* it. But it will only derail me from what I really want."

Armin tried catching Hermione's gaze. "Hermione. Hermione, what's the spell? Hermione, where's your wand? *Say the spell.*"

Her eyes glinted with a steel he'd never seen from her before. It was directed at Eren and it was as frightening as it was mollifying.

"Hermione," Mikasa warned, nonetheless surprised.

"See, I *could* go out and kill them all. Torment and torture every last Death Eater- every last *blood purist* till I'm satisfied, till I drop."

"Hermione," Hange's eyes widened.

"I'm powerful enough- I could do it. But true revenge is seeing the world they wanted for me to *never* come to fruition. To create an environment so accepting, so permanent, so sickening to them that their only choices are to concede and assimilate, or *die* trying to fight it."

Seeing her like this was his own little revelation. Her strength was terrifying, her anger was bewitching. But those thoughts did nothing to distract from his care nor his worry.

Friend's presence be damned, he cradled her cheek in an almost plead, "Mond," he whispered, "You can't keep bleeding out like this."

She was heaving, eyes unblinking, stuck in a place he didn't want her in. He gently shook her cheek until she blinked away from her thoughts.

"Hm?"

Captain Levi sighed, "Sit down, brat ."

Hermione assessed the Captain's face, confusion shifting to annoyance. "Ugh," she finally said, settling onto the bed. Palms pat the mattress, unraveling the sheets around her arm. Finally, she sighed at its retrieval.

Multiple pairs of eyes watched in fascination as she unwrapped the bandages and whispered some Latin-based spell, wand tip tracing those vile letters. After some well-observed silence, she cleaned up the blood once more then tiredly reached for Armin to hold her.

He happily complied, letting her head rest on his shoulder as she snuggled up against him.

This is nice. As nice as this situation would allow, of course.

It was... bittersweet, he compromised when he was suddenly struck by a realization.

I hope she doesn't regret sharing this with us...

Oh, Eren... he sighed and looked up only to find Eren nodding, seemingly satisfied. "At least we see eye to eye on some things."

Some of the tension dissipated from the air.

She blew a stray curl out of her face and chuckled darkly, "I guess."

"It wouldn't kill you to be more human once in a while."

"Ha! Ditto."

Eren shrugged, "That anger is productive, use it."

Hermione gave him a look of exasperation.

He shrugged again, looking away, "We don't *need* acceptance, Hermione. We need freedom. We can't just plead and wallow, letting our fate be decided by their hateful whim. We need to control our future, keep moving forward by *our* means."

Hermione thought for a second before nodding against Armin's shoulder, hair tickling his cheek, "Okay..." she sighed, "This is your world Eren, I'm not here to decide for you. I can only show you another way."

"And if there isn't?"

She shrugged. "I believe there is, but that's for all of you to decide." Armin held her tighter.

He nodded. "It is," he concluded.

"I do hope you get what you want Hermione. I hope we don't continue to fight on this... and I- I hope your curse ends," he

continued.

His eyes were far away, his mind was someplace else.

"I do too," she replied softly.

His eyes snapped back to the two entwined. "So what will you do? About the..." he trailed off, eyes glancing at the scars.

"Nothing now, maybe nothing ever," her eyes stayed downcast, "Perhaps something if... *when I go back- back to my world*," her quiet words faded into a whisper.

Armin stiffened and Hermione's hands tightened their hold on his nightshirt.

"Right, you're going back," Eren stared at him, his eyes never leaving his. "Good luck."

Armin's brows tightened.

"Mm," she hummed noncommittally. "Thanks."

Eren's slight frown deepened and his brows furrowed. "I... I need to go to bed. I'll see you later," and he was already on his way out before she could reply.

Mikasa made a quiet noise of surprise, looking reluctant to follow but was, of course, ever loyal. "Um, bye Hermione. I'll... I'll talk to you tomorrow?"

Hermione nodded with a small smile and Mikasa followed Eren out of the tent with a jog.

Armin watched her go, heart heavy, having witnessed people who were dear to him fight in such a way. It ached to know that though it ended in peace today, there was much left unsaid and much more conflict to come.

With such a grave topic, how could there not be?

From the corner of his eye, he watched as Hermione sat up to address the rest of the room. "Sorry, do you guys also need to go?" Her hands fell to the bed to then twist in the sheets.

"I've been keeping you all up with all my screaming and rambling and- well, I'm tired anyways," she added sheepishly. "Again, I'm sorry to have woken you all."

He reached for her nervous hands, doleful that she even apologized for her pain- or made excuses at her expense.

Captain Levi sighed. "Yeah, we do have to get some sleep," he bluntly replied. "And don't be stupid. You shouldn't apologize."

Before she could reply, he made a swift turn, "C'mon, Four Eyes," dragging a sputtering Hange out with him as he went.

A good call on his part, *else they keep Hermione up with their questions*, Armin thought.

Connie began shifting from one foot to another, his well-meaning awkwardness on display. "Uh, goodnight?" He looked around for a window, but none existed within the tent. "Good morning? But uh yeah," he scratched the back of his head, "No need to say sorry, Hermione, you've had it pretty rough."

Her face displayed a strained gratitude, "Um, thanks, Connie. I appreciate that."

"Yeah Hermione, I've been woken up in the middle of the night for way worse reasons than this!"

"That was one time, Sasha, and it didn't even-"

"-No! It was two and you-"

However amused he was, he was thankful for Jean's intervention, "Alright guys," he shot them a look.

Both of their eyes crept slowly to the side where they finally landed on Armin and Hermione on the bed.

"Oh yeah-" they both started. Their heads snapped towards each other.

"We're just gonna-"

"I think it's time we-"

Sasha and Connie stopped, leaving Jean open to take the reins.

"Night guys, we'll see you in the morning."

"Yeah, bye guys," they all waved apologetically before disappearing out of her bedroom door, their steps becoming fainter and fainter with each second.

"Interesting..." Hermione mused, brow raised.

"Never a dull day with them," he chuckled, studying their entwined hands.

She huffed softly, rubbing circles into the back of his hands with her thumbs.

"Yeah..." she replied softly.

"Yeah, I'm uh, sorry you had to see me like that. I hope you don't-"

" -No," he blushed. "I mean-" He recalled the glint in her eyes and the slight twitch of a smile at the corner of her lips.

Her head tilted in confusion, yet she managed a smile. "Armin, what is it?"

He shook his head, shooting her a bashful look from behind his lashes, "I... didn't mind at all- seeing you like that, that is."

"Oh."

Her smile became devious.

" *Oh.*"

"N-not like that- er, well..."

Her laugh was sudden and boisterous, warranting the snapping of her head back and the shaking of her shoulders.

Armin stared at the crinkle of her eyes and the revealed flesh of her neck. His blush not only *didn't* diminish but grew in size.

"Armin," Hermione's mirthful voice brought him back. "It's okay if it was. I don't mind," she echoed, smirking.

He scratched the hair near his temple, "Alright," he chuckled, slightly embarrassed.

"And oh, I don't know," she began, nudging him with her shoulder. "I'm kind of glad that you... *accept*," she shot him a knowing look, "that side of me. It's, ehem, quite dreadful, *I* think, but I'm glad it does something for you."

He shook his head, "It wasn't dreadful, just human. *Right*, Hermione?"

"Yes, yes. *My* bad," she rolled her eyes playfully, "you're right."

He didn't reply. He couldn't.

He couldn't help but let the silence linger- *permeate*. He loved taking in the animated light in her eyes or the upturned resting of her lips. He loved seeing her like this.

She looked good... happy.

"Feeling better?" Armin asked proudly.

She took a moment to consider how she was feeling, taking slow and thoughtful breaths.

"You know what? I think I am," her eyes widened in delight.

"Good," he felt something settle in his chest. Something finite and beautiful.

His hands tightened around her's, "I'm..."

... prepared to spend every last day of my life making sure that continues...

"Glad."

Author's Note:

You can also start requesting Armione one-shots for me to do, I've already posted some that you can read on my tumblr (link in bio) and my archive acc.

Once again, thanks to all that followed, favorited, or reviewed the last chapter. It was great to see! Normally, if you have an account and have left a review, and are wondering about my response → I send them through PM, so I think you can find them in your emails or Private Messaging Inbox.

Hope you've enjoyed!